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THÉOPHILE GAUTIER.

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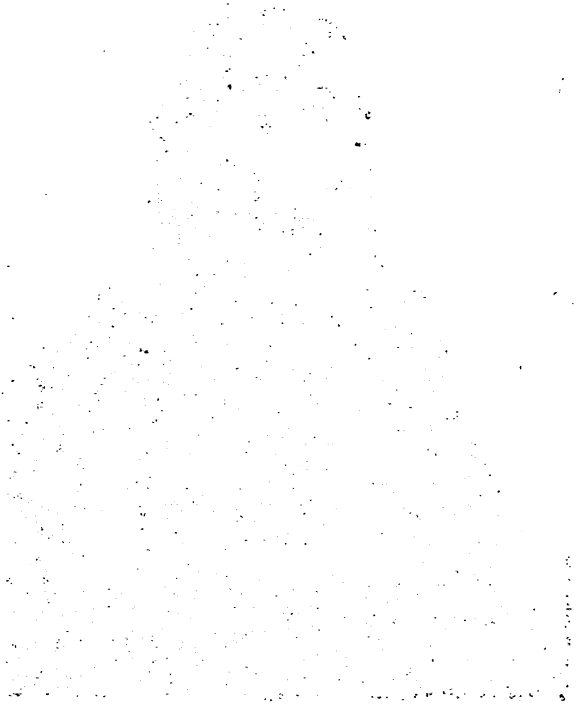

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

BY

MAXIME DU CAMP

TRANSLATED BY J. E. GORDON

PREFACE BY ANDREW LANG

WITH PORTRAIT

London
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PREFACE.

THE life of Théophile Gautier is of peculiar interest to men of letters, especially to that large proportion of them who, like Théophile, are "polygraphes." Our ancestors more briefly termed them "hacks," and, since Dr. Johnson, or, at least, since Southey, there has been no hack so distinguished as Théophile. His Pegasus was early broken into harness, and his biographer, M. Maxime du Camp, like himself, is constantly regretting this bondage. Perhaps too many laments are uttered over this misfortune; like other men, Théophile Gautier did what he could, and what it was in him to do. He was a poet, indeed, and we are asked to believe that, had the State aided him with an adequate pension, his place as a poet would have been higher, his poetic work greater in bulk, and nobler in quality. But this may well be doubted. The man of letters in Gautier was stronger than the poet; had it not

been so, probably he would have given himself more freely and with a stricter loyalty to the Muse. A writer in whom the poet is supreme, a writer like Wordsworth, or Tennyson, will take poverty for his bride, disdaining the seductions of labour which is easier and better paid. To both of these Englishmen fortune proved kind, after years of self-denial. As a rule, at least in England, the poet has been a man of leisure, or if, like Burns, he lived by the labour of his hands, he wrote poetry in his hours of freedom, without hope of practical reward. The circumstances of his life and his necessities made Gautier a journalist; very probably (or rather, certainly) he did not even possess the pittance on which Wordsworth and Tennyson cultivated verse with an exclusive devotion. But we feel a conviction that, if Gautier had been more ardently and essentially a poet, he, too, would have found or made a way by which he might devote himself to this art.

The truth is that he was not a poet of the highest, the creative order. His mind was not inhabited and possessed by airy beings, who insisted on being clothed in words and sent forth to live with Hamlet and Esmeralda, with Faust and d'Artagnan, Fantine and Di Vernon. Still less had Gautier the moral enthusiasm of Wordsworth, the natural magic of Keats, the ardent spirit of Burns, and his passionate interest

in life. Art was what Gautier loved—the beautiful of human creation. He is thus, as Plato says, distant by two degrees from the real, and his poetry touches life only on one side. Such poetry is neither the child of an absorbing and exclusive inspiration, nor so dear and necessary to men that a poet can live on bread thus earned alone. It was therefore necessary for Gautier, especially as his tastes were somewhat luxurious, to live otherwise, by the gifts which he could make profitable, really his more especial and singular gifts, his unrivalled art as a man of letters. He could not write an uninteresting line; he had not the art of being dull; to lack that was the gift of the fairies; on not being dull he lived. Consequently his genius is scattered widecast; his "three hundred volumes" are lost in a wilderness of old newspapers, and, if we ask for a "great work," it is not, or is represented only by two slim volumes of exquisite verse; a romance, not of the most enthralling; a novel, which lies patent to the censure of moralists; and a few short stories.

In none of these is the human interest the chief merit and attraction. There is style, there is charm, there is music; but there is more of life in a chapter of Dumas, or in a proverbe *of Alfred de Musset. Had Gautier, in addition to his other qualities, possessed the vitality, the humanity of Hugo, of Dumas, of Musset, his name*

would indeed be among the greatest of the great in the wide and glorious domain of French literature. But this vitality, this large and eager sympathy with what is universal, Gautier lacked. No pension, no sinecure, no leisure could have given him what Nature withheld, and he is neither to be blamed nor pitied, but rather applauded, for his industrious work in his own field, the common field of letters. Here he laboured after his kind, giving in abundant measure such enjoyment as he had it in his power to give. His reputation suffers from the common and irritating theory of the "Great Work," the magnum opus. *There was no* magnum opus *in him to give. We might as well ask an* orfèvre *like Benvenuto Cellini to build St. Peter's or the Parthenon; though the Perseus of the gold-worker is a greater triumph than was possible, in his own province, to Gautier. He himself was probably unaware of his limitations, and, loving poetry well, regretted that the lyre was often hung out of reach. But, to us who survive him, it may seem that he did what it was in him to do, that he did it to perfection, and with unwearied diligence. "He is known of his own," to quote the inscription on a miniature of James VIII. If they are few, they are loyal.*

Gautier's biography and his confessions prove that he was a born student. He had the love

of printed matter, he had a memory—as proved by his recital of a long poem of Hugo's only once read, which rivalled that of Scott. Sir Walter repeated, by the banks of the Tweed, a long ballad of Hogg's which had been read to him once, a ballad which the Shepherd had lost. Gautier might have rivalled this feat. With such a love of reading, with such natural scholarship as M. Maxime du Camp vouches for, with such a memory, Gautier had the complete equipment of a man of letters, combined with the temperament of an artist. Like Thackeray, of whom his melancholy and his gaiety both remind us, Gautier began life as a painter, but the current of 1830, *of Romanticism, carried him into literature. He very soon began to laugh at the boyish mediævalism of the Petruses and Jehans, but his life was inspired to its close by the memories of that gallant boyishness, and death found him as he was writing an article on the well-worn theme of* Hernani. *For* Mort aux Perruques *he substituted* Mort aux bourgeois, *and, to tell the truth, his bitter insistence on this hatred of the commonplace becomes tedious, becomes melancholy, as we read his harangues in the memoirs of the Goncourts. We cannot imagine Shakespeare, or Scott, or Dumas thus declaiming against the ordinary, the staple of human existence, the life that all the poets' fathers lived. That life, of course, is in-*

different to the finer things of art, but man was by no means born to live for art alone, and the majority of men welcome art only when it reflects the very everyday passions and experiences which Gautier scouted. The young lady of the familiar anecdote spoke of him as un cérébral, *and, in spite of his muscles,* un cérébral *Gautier essentially was. Endowed with a noble physical equipment, he lived by the brain rather than the heart. He could not forgive people who lived otherwise, and they, consequently, did not welcome him and his work as they welcomed Dumas, and Musset, and Balzac. In brief, he "lived in a vale," the vale of art and letters, and he and his fame "must accept the consequences of such a situation." For this Hollow Land is remote from the actual interests of mortal men; this realm they do not inhabit, and they hold but lightly the natives of the place. For* them *the wiser policy is "to take this for a hermitage," and be content among their dreams, indifferent to what is really so indifferent, the most sweet voices of the multitude. Unluckily Gautier did not attain to this philosophy. To despise the general and yet to be eager for its plaudits is the paradox of the artist. Thus does he disquiet himself in vain, conscious of greater powers, conscious that they are not fully recognised, because, in fact, the light in him is not completely focussed, does not concentrate and burn to a single point.*

It is possible to be too Puritanic in an estimate of Gautier's wrongs and grievances. The perpetual task of criticising trash, in pictures, in books, in plays, to write "sur la valeur litteraire de pièces qui, le plus souvent n'en avaient aucune," is, indeed, a burden almost not to be borne. M. Maxime du Camp thinks that Gautier might have written an admirable history of French literature. No doubt he might, but did anything external prevent him from doing it? To take a similar case, M. Paul de St. Victor produced exquisite essays, combined in Hommes et Dieux. *But he also found time and energy for a vast book on the Drama,* Les Deux Masques; *and it must be confessed that, in his long flight, the qualities which mark his short essays do not adequately sustain him; he lives by his collected articles. Gautier might probably, like St. Victor, have attempted his Great Work, in the way of literary history. But it does not seem probable that he would have sought for serious renown, except in works of imagination. His common task, as M. Maxime du Camp informs us, and as every one will naturally believe, he executed with honesty. The critic of those days, it appears, might have sold his pen to the managers of theatres. This was not a tempting crime in the eyes of Théophile Gautier.*

To him the suave scelus, dulce flagitium, *in*

the indulgent words of an ecclesiastical writer, took the form of Mademoiselle de Maupin. *Concerning that work, the remarks of M. Maxime du Camp may suffice. It was a* péché de jeunesse ; *we are told that Gautier's mother used to lock him up in his room till he had finished a due portion and set task of his book ; his book which must have astonished the excellent lady if she tried to read it.* Mademoiselle de Maupin *has been most read for its least essential qualities, its sensuous descriptions. What is essential, the style, and a peculiar form of the melancholy of René, and of the other youths who were as sad as night for the reason Shakespeare gives, are not attractive to the students who delight in the accidents of the romance. The story was always a stumbling-block in Gautier's path : it is a novel without heart, and with more than its share of the pride of the eyes and the lust of the flesh. All his stories are really poems and dreams, which he had not the leisure to write in verse, or which, in verse, would, of course, have been hopelessly unpopular. He is haunted by ghosts of the beauties of dead empires, by the gold and purple of Cleopatra, of Gyges, of Rome. In all this he is not without resemblance to Edgar Poe, but he had none of Poe's unrivalled art in the composition of plots which excite curiosity. At this he never aimed ; he was a painter of visions,* impossibilium cupitor. *The*

chief exception is Le Capitaine Fracasse, *a story of cloak and sword, which contains an excellent duel, but which never rivalled the popularity of* The Three Musketeers. *In thinking of Gautier's tales, one remembers the pleasure of the manner of telling, more than the matter told; the art, rather than the narrative. Thus they bear reading again and again, by those to whom the art of letters is dear.*

In spite of his labours as a critic, a literary voyager, and a story-teller, Gautier remained, at heart, true to his first love. He was a poet, and a true poet, but purely a poet in the school of art. His Emaux et Camées *remain an enduring treasure, but a treasure for the few. The pieces on the Flight of the Swallows, on the Obelisks, on Art, on the* Château de Souvenir, *remain among the dearest possessions of literature. To call them "exquisite," "chiselled," "impeccable," and so forth, is to say what is true, though it be so very far from new. Mr. Matthew Arnold has compared Gautier to a man who passes his life in an inn; we are not at home, it seems, in his verse. If it be so, his is an inn where we can take our ease with enjoyment. No one maintains that Gautier is to be a man's only poet; of course he is not a Shakespeare, or a Homer, but he has enriched the wandering world with happy and charmed resting-places, hung with rich old arras,*

musical with viol or lute. We are not always in search of moral counsel and comfort; there are moments when we are content to be pleased with a magic pleasure, and to pass an hour in a haunted chamber of romance.

After his poems, what we value most in Gautier is his reminiscences, his delightful tales of old days and old comrades, published in the volume called Histoire du romantisme. *His attachment to friends and memories, a smack of his youth, a certain undying boyishness in him, make us read him with a kind of affection and liking. In the correspondence of Scott, I find a letter from some unknown person, who praises him as "such a* friendly *writer." Gautier is a friendly writer; perhaps this is not made very conspicuous in M. Maxime du Camp's brief biography; in a volume of M. Bergerat's, but above all in the reminiscences of Theo himself, this amiable quality is now conspicuous.*

It was Flaubert, if I am not mistaken, who spoke of Gautier as "the least known of authors." Many years ago I wrote an essay on him, and was entertained by the article of a reviewer who took that opportunity of censuring my partiality for "mediæval Frenchmen." This did not look as if Théophile was a popular favourite in England. Even in France he was immensely read in feuilletons, *and practically unknown. The*

reason, as it seems to me, is that he created no characters, and gave no moral advice. He will always be the delight hominum venustiorum : *he will always be unpopular. Yet why unpopular? That he is, I can hardly doubt. Take the test of the bibliophile. One sees the first edition of* Emaux et Camées *priced at a louis, in catalogues. Take* Ménagerie Intime, *that witty, touching, humorous chronicle of cats and rats, dogs and horses, Jane, Blanche, and Don Pierrot de Navarre. If it contained nothing but the story of the* poulet vert, *it would still be a pearl. I send for a copy, and I find it still in the first edition of* 1869, *as published by M. Lemerre. This does not look like popularity, meanwhile the wise world is purchasing trash in many editions. In England* Ménagerie Intime *needs only to be read to be liked. Whoever wishes to know Gautier a little more thoroughly, as a man, will read his* Histoire du romantisme, *the* Souvenirs Intimes *of Madame Judith Gautier, and his* Tableaux de Siège, *where he keeps up his heart so bravely with such admirable temper. If there is a want of heart in his novels, there was abundance of it, we feel as we read, in his character. He kept his discouragement to himself, like a man, at least he kept it out of his literature. He did not carry his pessimism to market.*

"*Il fut le plus désintéressé des hommes*," says

M. Maxime du Camp, who knew him well. If he were a Cyrenaic philosopher, he had also the better part of stoicism, and he remains, like a greater than he, "such a friendly writer."

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THÉOPHILE GAUTIER.

CHAPTER I.

YOUTH.

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER was a type of what writers in library catalogues call a polygrapher. He was a man of letters in the large sense of the word; he did not imitate those writers who from barrenness of ideas, or from taste, devote themselves to some special subject, which becomes so much a habit that it is impossible to them to do anything else, and who find themselves out of their element at once if they leave their ordinary domain. For him the field, the vast field of literature, had no unknown territory. He might to a greater degree and better than *Pic Mirandola* have offered battle to all comers to discuss *de omni re scibili et quibusdam aliis*, for during the course of his life, pen in hand, he discoursed without ceasing. When we look at the mass of his

work, the product of forty years' labour, we are filled with surprise and respect before such remarkable industry, which embraced without difficulty subjects whose diversity is prodigious, and which he always treated with originality, often with the superiority of a master.

In the literary revival of which Chateaubriand was the precursor, Théophile Gautier stands in the front rank, brandishing his trusty Toledo pen, as they said in the days of the romanticist battles, giving way to no one, throwing himself into the thickest of the fight, facing to all sides, and redoubling in audacity under the invectives of which the new school was the object. He remained faithful to the beliefs of his youth; during the last years of his life, years that were heavy and at times painful, his heart would beat quicker and his face light up as he spoke of the first representation of *Hernani* and of the blows exchanged while Ligier declaimed the tirades of Triboulet in the *Roi s'amuse*. His faith, I mean his literary faith, was so profound, so buoyant, that the lengthened exercise of his calling did not in the least weaken it. He was full of fervour to the last, and if before closing his eyes for ever he turned them towards the monument that the writers of his generation, poets and prose-writers, have raised to the renaissance of Art, he must have felt reassured as to the future of his

name, well knowing that he had inscribed it on one of the crowning stones.

For posterity the pyramid rises of itself. Forgotten writers form the base, invisible, almost lost sight of in the foundations; then come the mediocrities of imperfect grasp, those whose will was stronger than their talent, the authors whom fashion has sometimes upheld on its fragile wings, novelists, historians, all the officers of the army of literature; and at last, quite at the top, almost in the skies, the poet takes the place which was due to him during his life, and which is only yielded to him when he is dead. To how many writers of the first flight might we not apply the epitaph which Gombaud composed for Malherbe :—

"L'Apollon de nos jours, Malherbe, ici repose;
Il a vécu longtemps sans se louer du sort.
En quel siècle ?—Passant, je n'en dis autre chose,
Il est mort pauvre. . . . Et moi je vis comme il est mort." [1]

A thousand minor causes exercise an influence, which is often tyrannical, on public opinion,

[1] "The Apollo of our days, Malherbe, here reposes;
He lived long without being able to boast himself of his lot.
In what century ?—Stranger, I will say no more,
He died poor. . . . And I, I live as he died."

and thrust aside living writers far below the rank which superior merit assigns to them. The future alone, freed from the pre-occupations of the time in which they gave their works to the world, is sufficiently independent to allot to them their place in the pantheon of the glories of the human understanding. Of praises and disparagements, failures and successes, hisses and bravos, the future takes no account; sooner or later the reputation, depreciated or exaggerated, finds by itself a definite level which nothing can alter. That is the almost unconscious, certainly disinterested work of posterity, which lasts for a longer or shorter period, according to the degree and the quality of the talent. It seems to me that in the high-water mark of celebrity the name of Théophile Gautier will always maintain a foremost place, the first perhaps after that of Musset, of Lamartine, and of Victor Hugo. In any case, Gautier's verses share with those of Musset a quality of the highest order—alone of their epoch they are untainted with rhetoric.

If there has only been some tenderness in our affections, we cherish deep down in our hearts a sort of holy sepulchre, in which those still live whom we have loved, and who are no more. Embalmed in the perfume of remembrance, they appear when we evoke them, reply when we

question them, and seem really once more to take up their former existence, to share it with us, so much do their thoughts mingle with ours, so well do they succeed in resuscitating things that have passed, and which we thought to be dead. It is a vision ; if we close our eyes we imagine that we see them with their familiar gestures, their attitude, their gait ; and if we listen we think we hear them. Amongst those who inhabit the mausoleum of my heart—so full, alas !—and where sleep so many that were dear to me, Théophile Gautier is one of those whom I call up most frequently to talk over the times that are passed, and our common friends, near whom he sleeps to-day.

Several of those whom I have known, and who shared the affection that I dedicated to him, were men and not demigods. I have lived beside them and judged them as contemporaries, for between them and myself the magnifying-glass of posterity was not interposed. The details of their personal existence have not yet —for me at least—been eliminated by time ; I perceive the work through the man ; the one completes the other ; this explains that ; and it would be giving the lie to truth to separate them. It is impossible to judge one's companion in life as one can judge some one who has been dead for one or two centuries. It is

with men as with landscapes, distance embellishes but distorts them, for it floods them with light, softens the outlines, and hides the rough places. Those who have seen them, who have been their daily associates, their confidants, sometimes even their confessors, those who remember them, do not hear the hour of apotheosis strike, but they owe it to themselves to be sincere even out of respect for him of whom they speak, and by so doing they often succeed in bringing back to life the real man with qualities that even his admirers did not suspect in him. To the spectators of the existence of many writers what is most extraordinary in their work is not the work itself, but the difficulties through which they have accomplished it; it is that nothing, neither narrow means, not to say poverty, nor the sufferings that result from it, have been able to check their soaring genius. That is what we must explain, however, to make what was exceptional in them intelligible, and that is where we must speak out in order to avenge them for the disdainful flippancy with which the ignorant public and even the enlightened few have treated them. "A lad named La Fontaine, devoted to polite literature, and who makes verses," said that scandalmonger, Tallemant des Réaux. That is how they are spoken of while they are still of this world:—

"Quitte, apres un long examen,
A leur dresser une statue
Pour l'honneur du genre humain." [1]

Théophile Gautier saw at once that poetry was looked upon as a sort of agreeable superfluity, useless in itself, good at most to amuse a few idlers, finding sufficient recompense in the applause which it called forth, unworthy on the whole of a serious man, meriting at best a barren encouragement. In this respect governments are agreed, whatever may be the difference in their origin and the divergence of their principles. Alfred de Vigny's *Stello* may not be historically true; it remains none the less philosophically true. Théophile Gautier experienced it for nearly forty years, during which he went through the mill of journalism in order not to want for daily bread. It never occurred to the Government of July, to the Second Republic, or to the Second Empire, in which, however, he counted some friends, that an adequately paid post—a sinecure if they liked—was due to a writer who only needed to be relieved from sordid care to spread his wings to their fullest extent. He had accepted his lot

[1] "After long delay cry quits,
Raising to them a statue
For the honour of the human race."

with a gentleness that often touched me, for without being exacting, he had a right to think that he deserved something better than the existence forced upon him.

He was born at Tarbes, August 31, 1811; he tells us so himself, and we may believe him;[1] nevertheless, an official document which I have before me makes him older by a day. In the muster-roll of the conscription of the military school in 1832 he is thus described: "Pierre, Jules, Théophile Gautier, born at Tarbes the 30th of August, 1811, a painter, living in Paris, No. 8, Place Royale." It was by chance, owing to an administrative post held by his father there, that he happened to be born on the banks of the Adour, in the native place of that Barère, who, after being the "Anacreon of the guillotine," became one of Napoleon the First's secret correspondents. He only lived there three years, and was brought to Paris towards 1814, where he suffered from home-sickness, an account of which he gives in some autobiographic notes that serve me as a guide in speaking of his childhood.[2]

[1] On August 13, 1890, a bust of Théophile Gautier was unveiled at Tarbes.

[2] This autobiography was written in 1867, and forms a number of the *Sommités contemporaines*, a publication started by M. Auguste Marc.

"Although I have passed a whole life in Paris," he says, "I have always remained a southerner at heart." Nothing could be truer. Born at the foot of the Pyrenees on the frontier of Spain, descendant of a family originally from County Venaissin, son and grandson of subjects of the Pope "in Avignon," there was always something exotic about him. Loving France, as he did passionately, he yet seemed out of his element there. There was nothing, even to his olive complexion without a tinge of colour in it, that did not look foreign, as though belonging to some Abencérage who had strayed into our civilization. His very appearance seemed to protest against the environment in which he was forced to live. Seeing him in his youth as well as in his ripe age, one felt how he was drawn towards the brightness and carelessness of the East. He found our sky dull, and our climate detestable, and he shivered at the least breath of wind. Invocations to warmth and the sun are frequent in his works. Under our often foggy sky, in the cold semi-obscurity of our winter days, he suffered from home-sickness, a longing for the warmth and brightness of the south.

He never felt what Chateaubriand calls "the delightful melancholy of the recollections of our childhood," for the first years of his life were not at all happy. He mourned for his native place

with a persistence and an intensity rare at that age when impressions generally have but a passing hold. He relates that, having heard some soldiers speak in the Gascon *patois*, which was the first language he had learnt to babble, he wished to follow them, so that he might accompany them on their way to the town where he was born, the thought of which always moved him. "The remembrance of the outlines of the blue mountains that one saw at the end of every little street, and of the streams which, flowing through green banks, intersected the town in all directions, has never left me, and has often filled me with emotion in my dreamy hours." He was fifty-six when he wrote the lines I have just quoted.

His little brain, at once contemplative and eager to learn, was beginning to expand when they sent him away from the paternal home to school. It was a grave mistake; a child who had suffered so keenly at being removed from his first cradle could not bear the exile from the hearth where the family took care of him, spoilt him, and had nothing but indulgence for his fancies. Théophile Gautier thought he was eight years old when the doors of the university barracks closed upon him; on this point his memory is at fault; he was in his twelfth year, as shown by a receipt of the steward of the

Louis-le-Grand college for the quarter of the first term, 1822. The poor schoolboy did not long remain a prisoner, long enough however, to have received an impression which was never effaced. He hated the discipline so fatal to the gaiety of childhood, the regularity, tedious because monotonous, the life in common odious to delicate natures, the comradeship without affection, the coarseness of the under-masters, the bare playgrounds, the long corridors, the dormitories, in which the beds were too numerous, the refectories, the very smell from which stilled hunger, the absurd punishments, the closed doors, and the general look of the place, more like a prison than an abode of learning. Small, puny, sickly in health, a dreamer, with no taste for noisy games, frightened, hopeless, he languished in that heavy atmosphere where he found no food for his instincts, his mind, or his heart. They taught him, it is true, that *Cornu* is undeclinable, and that *Tonitru* makes *Tonitruum* in the genitive, but that was small compensation for the sufferings he endured, and about which he kept silence with the natural timidity he could never completely throw off.

His father, thank Heaven, was a man of intelligence, who had not, like so many others, handed him over to the boarding-school of a college to save himself trouble. The child was

released from his gaol and taken home, and it was high time: silent, enfeebled, indifferent to everything, he was fading away, depressed under the moral regimen, by aid of which—I ask pardon of the University—more characters have been deteriorated than were ever developed. Forty-five years after having abandoned the blue stockings, pensioner's coat, and white cotton cravat, which then constituted the schoolboy's uniform, Théophile Gautier wrote:—

"I was seized with an unparalleled despair which nothing could dispel. The brutality and turbulence of my small fellow galley-slaves filled me with horror. I was dying of cold, weariness, and isolation between those great gloomy walls, where under pretext of breaking me in to school life a cur of an usher had constituted himself my tormentor. I conceived for him a hatred which is not yet extinguished. . . . All the provisions brought to me by my mother were left to become a mouldy heap in my pockets. As for the food from the refectory, my stomach could not stand it. I was like a caged swallow there, that refuses to eat and dies. They were very contented with my work however, and I promised to be a brilliant pupil if I lived."

He did live, thank God, and, unlike so many scholars held up as examples to their schoolfellows, he did not content himself with having been a brilliant pupil.

He then became a day scholar at the Charlemagne College, that is to say, he took part in the classes for two hours in the morning and two in the afternoon; the rest of the time he was free, and shared the home life indispensable to every child, doing his school work, learning his lessons, and preparing his translations and exercises under the direction of his father, who was a good classical scholar. Théophile Gautier profited by this, and profited so well that in 1860, at my house, I saw him translate a fragment of Tacitus at first sight, accompanied with a commentary that would have filled with envy a master of the Latin tongue and a history professor rolled into one. In the paternal home he regained not only the affection and liberty of which he was in need, and the lessons of a master understanding and developing the talents of his pupil—a rare thing—but he found books—history, poetry, novels, accounts of travels and adventures—which he already loved passionately. He tells us that by an effort of will and from pride he learnt how to read at the age of five. The first book which broke for him the mysterious seal of libraries, was *Lydie de Gersin*, then he read *Robinson Crusoe*, over which he nearly went mad, and, in his own words, "later *Paul et Virginie* threw me into an unequalled intoxication, which, when I was grown up, neither

Shakespeare, Goethe, Lord Byron, Walter Scott, Chateaubriand, Lamartine, nor even Victor Hugo, whom every youth adored at that time, afforded me." Having remarked at what a precocious age he made himself master of the art of reading, he adds: "And since that time I can say, like Apelles, '*Nulla dies sine linea.*'" That is absolutely true for I do not believe that there ever existed a more indefatigable reader than Gautier.

Everything served as food for this master craving, which seemed sometimes almost to degenerate into a mania; nothing discouraged him, and one might have said that his short-sighted eyes penetrated to the very heart of phrases, to discover in them riches which he alone knew how to recognise. I have seen him nearly bent double with excitement over the Sanscrit text of *Sakountala*, endeavouring to decipher, to guess at the signification of the signs of a language unknown to him. He found pleasure in the most indifferent novels, as he did in books of the highest philosophical conceptions, and in works of pure science. He was devoured with the desire to learn, and said: "No conception is so poor, no twaddle so detestable that it cannot teach us something by which we may profit." He read dictionaries, grammars, prospectuses, cookery books, and almanacs; he

estimated Mathieu Laensberg as "a primitive" remarkable for his simplicity, and thought Carême had proved that a "master cook" can possess grandeur of soul, because, he wrote: "It was only in studying Vitruvius that I understood the glory of my art." That was his favourite joke for some time. To those who discussed painting, sculpture, or poetry, he would reply: "You must study Vitruvius if you would understand the glory of your art." Most of his interlocutors remained open-mouthed, for few among them had read the works of him who called himself "The pupil and admirer of the illustrious La Guipiére."

This thirst for knowledge which nothing ever quenched had enviable consequences for Théophile Gautier. He was gifted with an extraordinary memory—whatever he had heard or seen remained engraved upon his mind; when a book came into his hands, he would open it almost mechanically, and never put it down until he had read it to the last page. One would think that a medley so miscellaneous and unmethodical would produce a certain confusion in his mind; not at all. He had one of the most methodical minds I have ever met everything in it became classified by a sort of natural process, a kind of instinctive deliberation, which sometimes contrasted with the

licence of his conversational style; it was a governing faculty that in the course of his forced literary work was of inestimable service to him. All the ideas he acquired were arranged and labelled in his memory like well catalogued books in a library. He knew where to find the information he required, the precise document which he wished to verify, the rare word he wished to employ, he only needed to consult himself. How many times his friends, doubtful upon some point of history, language, geography, anatomy, or art, have applied to him and received immediate satisfaction! They used to say then, "We have only got to turn over the leaves of Théo."

I will cite an example of his memory. The day on which the two first volumes of *la Légende des siècles* were published, I dined in his company at the house of another friend; there were several literary men amongst us, all allied more or less closely to the tribe of romanticists, admirers of Victor Hugo, and counting upon finding a feast of good things in his new work. The only one among us who knew the whole of it was Gautier; he had received the two volumes that very morning, and had read them through in the course of the day. Need I say what was the subject of the conversation? We talked only of Hugo's talent, which seemed to transfigure and give an

ever increasing beauty of form to his poetry, making it more wonderful and full of strength, as though seizing upon facts of history less real than legendary, he had soared into a fairy-land where his wings had never before carried him. Gautier said to us: "Let us prove what we advance—I will recite *les Lions* to you." And in his clear voice, without inflection, a monochord so to speak, his eyes gazing steadfastly as though he were reading from afar a book visible to himself alone, he recited the 158 verses of the piece, not repeating himself once, never hesitating, and not mistaking a single syllable. We were astonished, and said to him: "You have learnt that by heart, then?" to which he replied, "No, I read it this morning while I was breakfasting."

This memory, cleverly cultivated by the direction which his father gave to his studies, a sort of passive diligence which made him attentive to his school classes, and a certain amount of vanity, made of Théophile Gautier a remarkable pupil. Did he ever have his name inscribed on the prize-list? Was he embraced and crowned by his head-master to the sound of music, on the solemn platform for the distribution of prizes? Of that I know nothing, he was most discreet about this period of his existence, and did not care to talk about it, for he only retained disagreeable recollections of it; when-

ever the conversation turned upon his school-days he hastened to change it. He has written: "I would not live those years over again." If he won success, that academic success which brings so much hope to the paternal heart, and which never foretells anything of the future, he accepted it with indifference, and was none the prouder. I doubt even if he ever quite finished his humanities, and I believe he disdained to take his B.A., which would have seemed but a useless document to him; a certificate of studies, nothing more; he did not care for it, and was his own certificate, for he had already acquired many more precious ideas than his professors had taught him. While still a mere schoolboy he had read the old French poets, much neglected at that time when Malherbe and Boileau reigned supreme, and he had sufficiently studied Rabelais to be able to recite whole chapters of him without making a mistake. His curiosity, that of an intelligent child and future great writer, had done him better service than the pedantic lessons of the University.

Théophile Gautier was no longer the puny child with an olive complexion whom confinement had nearly killed, he was a strong, well-developed young man, whose taste for physical exercises had wonderfully increased his strength.

He excelled in swimming, boxing, and riding, at single-stick, and even at the *savate*, it was one of his small vanities, and he never refused a round. One day, I do not remember in which public garden, he dealt a blow with his fist at the "Turk's head," which marked 520 lbs. on the dynometer. I have often heard him boast of it and say: "It is the action of my life of which I am most proud." Up to the age at which one generally no longer attempts the *rôle* of Hercules, it did not displease him to demonstrate that his muscular power, always considerable, had not been lessened by years. If his calm, and above all benevolent character had not made him pacific he would have been a formidable person, but no man was less quarrelsome than he, all violent discussion seemed to him an outrage to human dignity, for he philosophically looked upon composure as a virtue.

It was by chance that Théophile Gautier devoted himself to letters, or to speak more exactly, that literature took possession of him. He was a born artist, of that there is no doubt an artist in form and line and colour. Whatever power he might have exerted over himself, or had been exerted over him by others, he would never have succeeded in repudiating the gifts which nature had lavished upon him,

would never have been able to put a constraint upon himself, or suppress the great abilities which spoke within him. Art claimed him for her own. In any official or commercial career he would have died of misery, paralysed, lost in the labyrinth of small details. Painting attracted him ; it was like a first love to him, the memory of which never grew cold ; during his whole life he was pre-occupied with it, and often in his hours of discouragement regretted that he had not obeyed his first impulse. The poet of the *Comédie de la Mort*, the *Émaux et Camées*, the writer of *Tra-los-Montes*, *Italia*, *Fortunio*, and *la Morte amoureuse*, works, the names of which are in every one's memory, began life as an art student. He entered Rioult's studio near the Charlemagne College, which enabled him to go and paint anatomical studies from the life after attending a lecture on the pre-established harmony of Leibnitz, or the plastic medium of Cudworth.

The mysterious tremour which precedes a storm was already agitating the young heads of that day ; the tempest of romanticism was soon to blow from all points of the horizon ; the arts, drowsing under a worn out tradition, slept in the faith of a past which had no longer any meaning, but they were soon to be waked up without consideration or even common

courtesy. A spirit of rebellion was rife in the studios, where the last disciples of the fossilized school of David exercised but an indifferent influence. While mixing their van dyck browns and burnt siennas, they discussed literature. Racine was not yet looked upon as a "scamp," *la Chute des feuilles* by Millevoye, and the Ossianic performances of Baour-Lormian were forgotten, and were replaced, to the great joy of future knights of the palette, by *la Chasse du Burgrave*:—

"Daigne protéger notre chasse,
Châsse
De monseigneur Saint-Godefroy
Froid!"[1]

or by *le Pas d'armes du roi Jean*:—

"Çà qu'on selle,
Ecuyer,
Mon fidèle
Destrier!"[2]

"Deign to protect our sport
O Shrine
From Monseigneur Saint-Godefroy
Cold!"

[2] "Let them saddle,
Equerry,
My faithful
Charger!"

It was not that they recited these verses, they howled them. Some enthusiasts had adapted an air to them, and sang them in chorus, which seemed a sacrilege. A new gospel had been given to the world of artists and writers; the preface to *Cromwell* had started a revolutionary theory which they dreamed of putting into practice. The time was not far distant when one was proclaimed "a hypocrite and a poor creature," if one did not shout with horror at the mere mention of the Institute. It was when he was mixing in all this noisy, generous, and audacious society that the literary vocation called to Théophile Gautier, "Leave there thy brushes and follow me." His destiny, till then ambiguous, on a sudden became clear, the following incident threw a light upon it. At the Charlemagne College Gautier formed a friendship, which nothing ever disturbed, with Gérard Labrunie who became Gérard de Nerval. At that period—that is to say, at the beginning of the year 1830—Gérard, almost unknown to the mass of the public, was celebrated among a group of young men whom Art had beguiled. He was illustrious among his fellow-students, for at seventeen, while still a pupil in rhetoric, he had published a volume of poems entitled: *Élégies nationales* which did not pass without notice. At eighteen he

brought out his translation of *Faust*, about which Goethe wrote to him: "I have never understood myself so well as in reading you." It was enough to turn a young head, but Gérard was already endowed with that modesty which sometimes verged on humility. His was a charming nature, a little eccentric in spite of his extreme gentleness. They promised him all the laurels that renown throws at the feet of great poets, he could only march to glory they thought, his path must pass under triumphal arches, and lead him to immortality. How it came to lead him into one of the most poverty-stricken streets of Paris, where he died an ill-fated death, I have told elsewhere, and am not going to repeat here.[1] It was Gérard who, fortunately, opened to Théophile Gautier the doors of the temple—many said the cavern—where the youthful statue of romanticism was enthroned.

The reading committee of the Comédie Française had received a drama in verse from Victor Hugo, *Hernani ou l'honneur castillan.* The old classical school, rivetted to the three unities, had shuddered to their very marrow at it. In the night plaintive voices had been heard proceeding from the urns in which the

[1] "Souvenirs littéraires," vol. ii. chap. xx; "Les Illuminés," Paris, Hachette, 2 vols. 8vo., 1883.

ashes of Marmontel and Campistron reposed, but in spite of these fatal omens, in spite of the predictions of the Calchas of tragedy, the piece was put into rehearsal. A thousand extravagant things were related of it; it was said to be an orgie of incoherent verses, and it was added that Mlle. Mars—the umpire of taste—was ill from annoyance, that she wished to give up her part, for she could not consent to profane her talent with the enormities imposed upon her by the author. The truth is it was quite the reverse of this; it was Victor Hugo who, justly incensed by the pretentions of the actress, told her that he would replace her with another interpreter if she again had the bad taste to modify the expressions that did not meet with her approval. Long before the day of the first representation it was felt that a storm of opposition was brewing; no trouble was taken to disguise hostile intentions, and it was known without any doubt that the cabal had decided to give battle. On both sides they prepared for the struggle; one party began to whet the sword of Orestes, the other to furbish up its good Toledo blade. The daughters of Jupiter and Mnemosyne were invoked; they swore by Saint John of Compostelle, and even by the Virgin. Everything promised that the contest would be a warm one; simple spectators rubbed

their hands and hummed the finale to *Comte Ory* :—

> " J'entends d'ici le bruit des armes,
> Et le clairon vient de retentir." [1]

In the romanticist camp they did not feel very reassured, they suspected some stratagem, and above all, feared a defection in the claque, exposed as it was to disloyal manœuvres and to promises that had a metallic ring about them. The adversaries of the young school counted in this respect on the force of habit. Would not these brave knights of the chandelier, accustomed for so long to the pure doctrines of the revered art, to the monotonous purr of tragic verse, the invariable cæsura, the hemistiches all cast in the same mould, to the helmet, the sword, the tunic and buskin, turn rebels in listening to these verses stamped with a new effigy, these astounding gymnastics of style, and words proscribed by the " canons." And, too, in seeing the plumed caps, the velvet doublets, shell-hilted swords, embossed daggers, and yellow leather boots, the whole paraphernalia, in a word, of what was at that time called local colour, and which was not long in degenerating into *bric-à-*

[1] " I hear afar the clash of arms,
And the bugle sounds an alarm."

brac. Well, then there was no depending upon the claque, upon those noisy functionaries whose duty it is in all and every case to uphold the plays of which the birth is difficult. It was resolved to do without the help—as being too uncertain—of these midwives, licensed by Thalia and Melpomene, for fear of a miscarriage, or perhaps even an infanticide. But who was to replace them? Where find a group of young men, enthusiasts, valiant even to imprudence, scorning all obstacles, tired of the past, having faith in the future, understanding that their entire fortunes might depend upon victory, and endowed with good lungs and strong fists? In the studios. Painters and sculptors eagerly obeyed the call; the architects were languid and tardy, they preferred the newly constructed colonnade of the Bourse to the doorway of Notre Dame. It was expedient to make use of them, however, but they were mingled amongst the other artists who were charged to keep guard over them and guide them in the right way, even with kicks if necessary.

Carefully chosen crimps were despatched to the studios. As visitors of the great good cousins, that is to say, the Carbonari, they had to elect the chiefs of the squads, to whom they would confide not the hazel wand which gave access to the secret sales, but the red ticket

stamped with the Spanish word *hierro* (iron), which would open to them the doors of the Comédie Française on the evening of the first representation, the first battle of *Hernani*. Gérard de Nerval was one of the recruiting sergeants charged with forming the sacred battalion which was to conquer or die. At Rioult's studio he gave Théophile Gautier six entrance tickets.

"You will answer for your men?"

"I will answer for them by the skull out of which Lord Byron drank at Newstead Abbey!"

Then, turning to his comrades of the palette, Gautier said: "Am I not right, boys?" To which, with one voice, they shouted, "Death to the Fogies!"[1]

Proud of the confidential mission entrusted to him, shirking none of the responsibility, and desirous of giving to his appearance a solemnity worthy of the high functions which had devolved upon him, Théophile Gautier made himself a waistcoat—a doublet—of crimson, "which he had taken pleasure in composing himself." This red waistcoat, which was in point of fact bright pink, inaugurated to the sound of the horn in

[1] I had this anecdote from Pradier, who related it to Victor Hugo in my presence in the month of July, 1851. Théophile Gautier was present, and did not contradict it, contenting himself with saying, "Ah! those were good times."

Hernani, was talked of in those days. They talked much of it, they talked long, they talk still. I said to Théo one day, "You became celebrated at a very early age?" To which he replied with that apparent indifference which at times gave so much point to his jokes, "Yes, very young, on account of my waistcoat."

Of this first representation of the first romantic drama in verse,[1] at which Gautier paraded, his long hair hanging to his shoulders, his chest covered with gorgeous satin, I shall say nothing, for he has told it all himself down to the smallest details. It was, in short, a battle at which neither insults nor blows were spared. The inexact hearing of a word produced such a disturbance that the curtain had to be lowered and the combatants turned out. When Hernani says to Ruy Gomez, who comes to deliver up Dona Sol to the King Don Carlos:

Vieillard stupide! il l'aime.[2]

[1] *Hernani* (February 25, 1830) was the first romantic drama in verse; a year before (February 10, 1829) Alexandre Dumas had produced the first romantic drama in prose, *Henri III. et sa cour*, which was brought out at the Comédie Française under the singular title of a tragedy in five acts. During the course of 1829 *Henri III.* was played forty-six times, and during 1830 *Hernani* was played thirty-nine times. That was a considerable success for those days, when no railways existed to bring to Paris, as they do now, the mass of provincials and foreigners who every night renew the audiences in our theatres.

[2] Foolish greybeard! he loves her.

Some of the spectators, instead of "vieillard stupide!" heard "vieil as de pique!" (old ace of spades!) The classicists, filled with indignation, uttered cries of horror; the romanticists roused to admiration, and carried away by the novelty of the expression, stamped their feet and shouted with joy. The tumult was slow to calm down, and I much doubt if anything at all was heard of the third act.

This representation which, in spite of the *Odes et Ballades*, *Cromwell* and its preface, *les Orientales*, and *le Dernier jour d'un condamné*, marks the real beginning of the romanticist revolution, left an ineffaceable impression on Théophile Gautier's heart. It was the one episode in his life to which from predilection he liked to return, and in his works the allusions to it are frequent. He liked to tell of the long wait—a wait which lasted eight hours—in the dark theatre, of their emotion, of the struggle in which each of the rival camps claimed the victory, of the discussion occasionally degenerating into violence that was continued after the play, of the passion with which they were animated, and the exasperation that carried both parties out of all bounds, and produced quite unexpectedly comic effects. A deputation of classical authors, famous then, forgotten to-day, presented themselves before the king, and begged

him to use his royal authority to forbid the representation of such a monstrosity. One might have thought one was listening to the admonitions of Maître Pancrace in the *Mariage forcé:* "Everything in these days is turned upside down, and the world become generally corrupt. Frightful licence reigns everywhere, and the magistrates appointed to keep order in this state ought to feel ready to die of shame for suffering so intolerable a scandal." Charles X. listened with his customary politeness to the lamentations of these good folk, and replied to them, not without wit, "In such a case I have no other right except that of my place in the audience."

I have, besides, heard it said by a former very high functionary of the Restoration that there was no great anger felt at the Tuileries over the tumult roused by the new piece, as it diverted public opinion from other already very disquieting matters. Théophile Gautier did not trouble himself much about public opinion, he belonged to *Hernani*, to Victor Hugo, he had yielded to an irresistible impulse, given himself up entirely, without thought of return, and he never drew back, to his last hour he remained devoted to the god of his youth. When death in such cruel haste plucked the pen from his hand he left an unfinished article entitled *Hernani.* The last

lines of it are devoted to Mme. de Girardin: "On that evening, that ever memorable evening, she applauded the shocking beauties, the revolting strokes of genius, as though she had been one of us, who had entered at two o'clock with the red ticket." . . . The phrase is broken off by the Great Reaper, whose own work nothing ever interrupts.

That "ever memorable evening" is an important epoch in Gautier's life; it is an initial stage whence he set out to walk along the tedious road of labour which had no resting-place, and upon which he sank down prematurely, harassed with fatigue and disillusioned, as poor in the end as at the beginning. He had no suspicion of the unpromising fate that awaited him, and no hope was forbidden to him then. How often in talking to me of that past time, about which I liked to question him, has he quoted the verse:—

"J'étais géant alors et haut de cent coudées."[1]

And he would add with a melancholy that spoke of many abortive dreams, "All that I can say to-day is that the poor old fellow still lives." After that evening of the 25th of February, 1830, understanding that we cannot serve two divinities

[1] "I was a giant in those days a hundred cubits tall."

at the same time, he left the Rioult studio, and took up the pen of the poet in place of the painter's brush. He was then nineteen, troubled himself little about what the world might say, and made verses, for he had it at heart to take rank in the romanticist army, to be one of the banner-bearers of the general-in-chief. Ill-luck sent him a forewarning which passed unnoticed. His first book—a thinly bound volume, stitched in pink, and entitled *Poesies*—was published on the 28th of July, 1830, which portended—every revolution will bring you harm—a fact he had to acknowledge later, in 1848 and in 1870. Like the Capets and the Valois, the Bourbons saw their dynasty become extinct on the throne, by the successive reign of three brothers. The overthrow of France produced them, the July revolution swept them away; the elder branch is dried up for ever, and will never flower again. Those days of strife, so imprudently provoked, not only without means of attack, but even without means of defence, exercised a considerable influence on the arts of the period. The tempest of excitement that was raging set free the minds of the day, helped to break down routine, and brutally smashed in the door which romanticism, in spite of those heated evenings of *Hernani*, had only set ajar. A few lovers of the classic muse, guided by leaders from whom youth turned

away, Brifaut, Arnault, Parseval de Grandmaison, Baour-Lormian, De Jouy, and Viennet, remained sturdily at their post, but they stopped up their ears and closed their eyes, so as not to hear or read, understanding nothing of the strivings of the writers and artists, thinking all was lost because new forms were being sought after, different from those they admired. They saw nothing in this great movement of intellectual renovation but an invasion of barbarians, by whom the whole civilisation was to be crushed. The hour was propitious for Théophile Gautier to cast in his lot with the Romantic School. One would have said that the July revolution had bathed the country in the fountain of youth; all the world was young at that time, or imagined that it was; nevertheless it was the fashion to be fatal and accursed, and that they were in all sincerity, and with a quiet conscience, and a conviction which did not, however, prevent them from amusing themselves.

It was the hour of young France; Théophile Gautier ridiculed them thoroughly, for in spite of the sincerity of his Romanticism he was never one of those who miss the ridiculous side of things. I was quite a child then, but I remember in passing along the Boulevards, in the garden of the Tuileries, which was at that time the favourite promenade of the Parisians, to have

seen some young men with long hair and wearing beards—quite contrary to the fashion of the day—with pointed hats, in tight frock coats with large lappels, their feet hidden beneath elephantine trousers. I looked at them with surprise and some fear, and asked, "Who are those people?" to which came the reply, with a shrug of the shoulders, "Those are madmen." Théo often said to me, "It was our dream to turn the world upside down." Poor world, it still turns upon the same axis, and since those far-off days it has seen many strange things!

In the years which followed the July days life amongst the youth of the time was full of extraordinary violence; it expanded all at once after the compression under which it had suffered during the Restoration. This effervescence lasted some time. The sudden invasion of cholera in 1832 and the scare caused by it hardly served to calm it; in order to put it down and quell it almost completely it needed the Fieschi outrage, the horror that he inspired, and the repressive laws which Thiers caused to be passed in the month of September, 1835. Until then they did not know how to control themselves; those were the gay days of the Shrove Tuesday cavalcades, the balls at the Variétés, and visits to suburban drinking gardens; they outrivalled each other in high

spirits, in wildness, and, let us add, in folly. "It was the thing," said Gautier, "to be violent, high-spirited, mediæval, and to beat the watch." I remember an incident that proves what a degree of licence they had reached in inventing follies that were to "do for the bourgeois." At a masked ball at the Variétés Theatre, d'Alton-Shée—a peer of France—very young, it is true, and Labattue, who was always, and is still, confounded with Lord Seymour, took with them a woman enveloped in a black domino. While taking part in a quadrille, in which the dancers were chosen from among the most illustrious supporters of Young France, she all at once threw off her covering, and appeared in the costume of Mother Eve before the intervention of the fig-leaf. The creature was a success, and they cheered her. The exhibition seeming excessive to the police and the municipal guard they tried to arrest the damsel, whose dancing was in itself an outrage to public morality; but they did not succeed. Surrounded and defended by a band of young men, who shouted, "Praise to the ladies!" the officers were obliged to recede before the blows and kicks of the learned in boxing and the *savate*. During the hubbub the dancer was covered up in her domino again, was able to slip away and lose herself in the crowd, and the law was rendered powerless. I knew

the names of most of these protectors of the weaker sex, but have half forgotten them now. Besides those I have mentioned I can only remember with certainty that of the painter Jadin, "who alone was worth a whole company of Scotch archers." Most of these unbridled desperadoes have become personages now, and have got on in life. The riotousness of twenty implies nothing unfavourable for the future. Age undertakes the responsibility of everything, even too often to the effacing from our memories former peccadilloes. Mme. de Lafayette wrote to Ménage: "It costs dear to become reasonable, it costs us our youth." Théophile Gautier was young—he was very young, and deserves to be praised for it.

"The habit of chastity hardens the heart," said Saint Clement of Alexandria. Théophile Gautier had not at all a hard heart, and was not wanting in eclecticism. In his "bantering" novel, *Jeune-France*, written when he was twenty-two, there is a chapter called *Celle-ci et Celle-la*, which might really be a fragment of confession. "Keep this," he says, "and shut it up in one of the drawers of your judgment for use on occasion, 'every woman is as good as another provided she is as pretty.'" That sounds like a profession of faith. We may conclude from it that love of form predominated in him, and that

the mingling of souls so much in fashion in the romances of the day seemed to him but of secondary importance. Judging by the large number of letters addressed to him, and which I have turned over, he would appear to have little resembled that Abbé Dangeau of the French Academy, who used to return to the ladies whom he loved their epistles if the spelling was defective, and break with them altogether at the third show of want of respect for French grammar. Some excuse may be made for these correspondents of Gautier's, for he always showed a certain tendency to choose them from among foreigners.

Boisterous pleasures such as belonged to the time, and fleeting love-affairs, were nothing but amusements without bad consequences, interludes in the intellectual life which followed its course, and to which Gautier brought the encyclopædic curiosity with which he was endowed. Artists and painters mixed together completed each other, and plastic art and thought were strengthened one by the other. There was no question in art, philosophy, history, and poetry which was not discussed in the *Cénacle*, that is to say, in the group of young men, partisans of the new ideas, whose hardihood broke down the accepted rules to which they refused to submit. Their discussions were carried on at random,

set going by a chance word spoken, an unexpected controversy started. I said to Théo, "with what did they occupy themselves in the *Cénacle?*" and he replied, "with everything, but I don't very well know what they said, because they all spoke at once." The violence of their language was unparalleled, and highly seasoned stories never seemed out of place; was not Rabelais their excuse and example? They dreamed of setting fire to the Institute, and of hanging a few of the tragic poets, who, for the most part, only asked to be allowed to die in peace. Age was held up to ridicule in the sittings of these future captains of literature, who seemed to forget that they themselves would grow old, and that decay is one for Classicism and Romanticism. Youth runs to extremes, which is natural, for its whole being is in a state of effervescence, and stirred by a thousand confused aspirations; it is intolerant because it is without experience, and because it is wanting in material for comparison; it is without balance because it has not yet come in contact with the difficulties of life; it does not believe in time and in the modifications brought with it—insensibly and yet how rapidly—because it has not yet felt its permanent effect. In youth, courage and folly are much the same thing, and we must not disparage it, for it is

almost always a promise of power in the years of maturity.

Are we to conclude from all this that the young men who composed the *Cénacle* were every one of them to become great? No indeed; there were amongst them dreamers, deluded about themselves, barren dupes of the comedy in which they were playing, failures, whose brilliant promise faded quite naturally into obscurity. To more than one might have been applied the words of Rivarol, "It is a terrible advantage, never to have done anything, but we must not abuse it." On the whole, only one amongst them made a name for himself which will never perish, that was Théophile Gautier. Gérard de Nerval, by whom he had been outstripped at the beginning of life, never got beyond a somewhat limited mediocrity, did not make his mark in the crowd, and foundered early. On the other hand, more of them were celebrated in the group, or rather coterie, to which they belonged; but their reputations did not penetrate much beyond the circle in which they lived. That was the common fate then, it remains the same to-day.

It would seem that the search after an unusual pseudonym, or the discovery of an extravagant title for a work, was a glorious and enviable action. Jules Wabre—who remembers

him ?—almost became illustrious by announcing —nothing more—a book entitled *de l'Incommodité des commodes.* Auguste Maquet, who had not yet had the good fortune to meet Alexandre Dumas, called himself Augustus MacKaët ; Théophile Dondey because Philothee O'Neddy. Gautier called to mind this idle nonsense when he wrote *les Jeune-France.* "For six months Daniel Jovard was in quest of a pseudonym, and by dint of searching and puzzling his brain he found one. The prenomen was in *us*, the name crammed with as many k's, w's and other like romantic consonants as it was possible to get into eight syllables." This mania lasted some time, and if we made a careful investigation we should perhaps find that it has not yet disappeared.

The great man in the *Cénacle*, he for whom was predicted all the glory to come—*tu Marcellus eris !*—was neither Jehan du Seigneur, nor Bouchardy, who was the Shakespeare of the boulevard du Crime, nor Gautier, who was a great poet, it was Pierre—pardon—Petrus Borel. They said without smiling : "Father Hugo had better look to himself, for he will be reduced to powder as soon as Petrus makes his *début !*" Petrus made his *début*, but with the exception of his friends, no one remarked it. In the Romanticist School they were so impressed by a

man's exterior, that Petrus Borel owed his future greatness to his dark complexion, black hair, aquiline nose, and spare and nervous body, which made him resemble the type created by Victor Hugo for the character of Hernani. To resemble John of Aragon, Grand Master of Avis, Duke of Segorbia, Marquis of Monroy, and not to be a great man, what do I say, the greatest of men was a heresy, that no member of the *Cénacle* could conceive. Thirty years after the *Cénacle* had disappeared, dead, annihilated, except in the memory of a few of the faithful, Gautier said to me, raising his hands to heaven: "And to think that I believed in Petrus!" He was not the only one, and what a discomfiture it was when the *Rhapsodies*, *Champavert*, and at last *Madame Putiphar* appeared. He had been an architect to start with, and had no business to give up the square and Indian ink for the pen and ink of little use to him. His first efforts not having fulfilled the promises which they had never held out, he managed to get a post in Algiers as underprefect or something of that kind.

In the *Cénacle* they despised the School of Fine Arts, pupils and professors were unanimously looked down upon. To be admitted to the "salon" was not very estimable, and to obtain the *grand prix de Rome* was to be

marked with an indelible stain. The pictures of Paul Delaroche were hardly worthy to appear as fire-screens, and Cortot had never known how to make a man stand upon his feet. In sculpture they extolled Auguste Préault, who they said "modelled ideas;" in two words, he was a very good fellow, and very witty, to whom nothing was wanting but the knowledge of his art. In painting Eugène Devéria had revived and eclipsed Paul Veronese, as was proved in those days, though not in ours, by his *Naissance de Henri IV.* As for Louis Boulanger, who was a particular friend of Victor Hugo's, it would have required more than a Tintoretto or a Titian to prepare his palette. Those were the gods of the new art; ephemeral gods who had never wetted their lips with the nectar that confers immortality.

Amongst the neophites, whose idols they were, I must mention Célestin Nanteuil, with whom I associated at that time, when age had already touched him, and who was one of the most charming souls I have ever met. Somewhere about 1830, when the Romanticist conflict was in full force, he was a tall, fair young man, of exquisite gentleness, in spite of the energy of his convictions, dreaming, he too of reviving painting, and so entirely "mediæval" that he served Théophile Gautier as a type for the character of

Elias Wildmanstadius in *les Jeune-France.* He should have been a painter, he was not one. The "detail one must live" obtruded itself upon him, and he was obliged to disperse—to waste—the talent, which poverty, always at his heels, never allowed him the leisure to concentrate. He would gladly have painted historical pieces, such as the assassination of the Duke of Orleans, near the Barbette house, the murder on the Montereau bridge, the combat of the Thirty, and with delight he would have represented the alley where Valentine falls cursing Marguerite, and the Cour des Miracles that Pierre Gringoire amused with his awkwardness. Instead of the pictures which he conjured up in his mind, and which would under his brush have acquired a respectable sincerity, he squandered his energies on all kinds of illustrations, done from day to day at the command of his editors, and to provide for his material necessities.

As soon as he had got together a little money he would sit down at once before his easel, and paint one of his rare pictures, which were exhibited at the salon with some success. It was but a false hope however; as soon as the small saving was exhausted he had to leave the unfinished canvas, upon which, perhaps, many hopes had been built, and take up again the etching needle, the lithographer's pencil, or the

blacklead pencil of the designer on wood, to make frontispieces, tail-pieces, ornamental letters and vignettes for novels. In this sort of work he wore himself out.

Towards the end of his life he was appointed director of the school of design at Dijon, which meant assured ease, and he set to work and took up his paint-brush; but it was too late, and he perceived that he had changed his gold piece for copper. With all due deference, as the rustics say, I would certainly compare Célestin Nanteuil to Théophile Gautier. The same fatality hung over their existence, the one being a painter, the other a poet. Both had to devote the best part of their time to pursuits—illustrations, journalism—which prevented them from giving to their works the breadth of which their talent was capable. In spite of the allurements of their vocations, time and leisure were wanting to both of them: to Célestin Nanteuil to devote entirely to painting, to Théophile Gautier to devote to poetry. Art would have gained by it, and France too; but hunger could not wait. In the intimate circle of the *Cénacle* Célestin Nanteuil was called captain, not that he had ever worn the double epaulette of gold, or the ordonnance sabre. No, indeed! the initiated had souls above everything but authentic Toledo blades, Milanese coats-of-mail, poignards chased

by Benvenuto Cellini, and they would have preferred to all other arms :—

> "Notre dague de famille ;
> Une agate an pommeau brille
> Et la lame est sans étui." [1]

Well then, Célestin Nanteuil had seen no actual military service, nevertheless his nickname was well merited, and confirmed the valour displayed on the Romanticist field of battle, when at the first representations of Victor Hugo's play, the stalwarts, the long-haired, and the die-hards were brought up, and their intervention, as opportune as it was fierce, often turned the scale of victory. These champions, whose enthusiasm nothing could moderate, were in the Romanticist army what the Old Guard was in the armies of Napoleon I., they never retreated. This sacred battalion was commanded by Célestin Nanteuil. In the month of March, 1843, when *les Burgraves* was to be played at the Comédie Française, Victor Hugo called to mind the vigorous leader, who had not spared himself at the representations of *Hernani*, *le Roi s'amuse*, *Lucrèce Borgia* and *Marie Tudor*, and

[1] "Our family dagger
On the pommel of which an agate shines,
And the blade is without a sheath."

he despatched two of his disciples to him, to ask for three hundred young men, to whom would be entrusted the mission of helping on the success of the next drama. Célestin Nanteuil listened to the messengers and replied: "There are no more young men." They insisted, and shaking his head sadly, as though he had witnessed the defeat of a once victorious army, he repeated: "Tell the master there are no more young men." Not another word could they get out of him. *Les Burgraves* was played—it was not a battle, it was a rout.

From the *Cénacle*, that centre at once turbulent from the inflexibility of its opinions, and tender from the affection which united all its members, intoxicated with the love of art, immoderate as becomes the springtide of youth, worthy of having for a motto the word *excelsior*, above all disinterested, without any thought of gain, despising ease, believing that one could live on poetry, breakfasting on an ode, and supping on a ballad; from all this Théophile Gautier received an indelible impression. All his life he remained the mystical companion of the first disciples, and the worshipper of Victor Hugo, revealer, apostle, and prophet. The eccentricities of which he had been the witness and often the hero, foolish as they were, were not without their use to him. They would seem

to have been crystallized and purified in him into that originality which is one of the primordial qualities of his talent, and which gives him an individuality recognizable from amongst all others.

How he regretted those hours at the *Cénacle*, the remembrance of which charmed him to the threshold of old age which he was never to cross! He could not speak of them without being moved, and with his emotion was mingled a touch of pride as he recalled "those charming days of poverty when we fed upon glory and love," and he would exclaim, "Did any one ever have better fare?" One day he came upon a letter written to him in 1857, by Bouchardy, he whom the *Cénacle* called the Maharajah of Lahore; his whole heart was in a tumult over it, for his old companion in idealism wrote: "We dreamt the most beautiful of all dreams, with open eyes and hearts full of faith, enthusiasm, and love." At these words Gautier started like a veteran captain at the sound of the bugle, and wrote:—

"Already twenty-seven years separate us from 1830, and the memory of it is as fresh as a memory of yesterday—the feeling of enchantment still lives. From the land of exile where we are journeying, gaining glory in the sweat of our brow, through the briars,

and over the stones and paths full of pitfalls, we turn with deep regret and sad eyes towards our lost paradise. Such joy doubtless cannot last. To be young, intelligent, to love one another, to sympathize and commune upon all kinds of art; it is impossible to imagine a more delightful manner of living, and all those who have experienced it have preserved from the memory of it a charm that will never die." [1]

Another time, referring to the same period, he writes to Sainte-Beuve: "Yes, we believed, we loved, we admired; we were intoxicated with the beautiful, and we experienced the sublime madness of art."

No, "such joy could not last," and the *Cénacle* was dispersed, its members left the high-road where they had marched in company, and each took the path that his powers or necessities opened out to him. They remained united by the invisible bond of a common faith, but they were scattered. The company was not actually disbanded, but each soldier went his own way, well knowing that at the first call to arms they would all meet again around the flag.

About this time, *i.e.*, in 1833, Théophile Gautier installed himself in the *cul-de-sac* Doyenné, in an old house inhabited by Camille Rogier, Arsène Houssaye, and Gerard de

[1] *Histoire du romantisme*, pp. 86, 87.

Nerval. It was the Thebaid in the midst of Paris. The completion of the Louvre, and the plantation of the Square, have done away with all the old buildings that existed then, the remembrance of which can only be recalled with difficulty in our day. Gérard de Nerval has written a history of the life which the four friends led there, and he christened it *la Bohême galante.*

In 1836 Théophile Gautier went on to *la Presse* newspaper, which was just being started; he was at first entrusted with the art criticisms, and a short time after with the dramatic criticisms. "There," he says in his *Autobiographie*, "ended my happy, independent, careless life." Journalism seized upon him, and was never to let go again.

CHAPTER II.

CRITICISM.

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER was twenty-five in 1836. He was no longer unknown to a certain select set of readers, and he was celebrated in the artistic world, in the world of letters, and in the Romanticist school, which saw in him one of its most illustrious adepts. He had not been idle, and his literary baggage was already considerable. The non-success of his volume of poems, offered to the public at so inauspicious a moment, while Paris was erecting barricades and shouting, "Long live the Charter!" had not discouraged him, for he published successively, *Albertus*, 1832; *les Jeune-France*, 1833; the first part of the *Grotesques*, 1834; and *Mademoiselle de Maupin* in 1835, besides an appreciable number of articles on every subject which appeared in different periodicals.

These articles, with their nomenclature, an indication of their source, date, quotation, and estimation, will be found in the book consecrated

by the Viscount Spoelberch de Lovenjoul to the works of Théophile Gautier. With the patience of a Benedictine, and a perseverance that calls forth admiration, the author has collected every volume, every article, every scattered leaf of Gautier's enormous labours; he has omitted nothing, not even different readings, not even the *errata*. It is the act—and a worthy one—of a devotee towards his idol. The whole of the work of that careless genius, one of the most formidable labourers in the field of French literature, the whole of the vast toil which filled his life, is unrolled and unveiled day by day, hour by hour, so to speak, from the moment when on leaving college Théophile Gautier took up his pen for the first time, to the hour when it fell from his cold hand. No more glorious monument, built up of unexceptionable materials, could have been raised to the memory of the poet and prose-writer. To those who are tempted to repeat the calumny of the idle commonplace "Gautier is indolent," we can henceforth offer a contradiction impossible to rebut, by pointing to the two enormous volumes into which M. Spoelberch de Lovenjoul has condensed the result of his researches, and which will often serve us as a guide.[1]

[1] *Histoire des œuvres de Théophile Gautier*, by the Viscount Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, Paris, Charpentier, 1887, two vols. in

The first article that Gautier wrote for *la Presse* is dated August 22, 1836; the printers signed it Gauthier, with that parasitical *h* that pursued the poet during his whole life, and sometimes drew a smile from him, which was not without bitterness. For nineteen consecutive years he was the ordinary purveyor of articles on art and dramatic criticism, in what was then called *Émile de Girardin's Journal.* He left it in April, 1855, to join the *Moniteur universel.*

When the *Journal officiel* was started to replace the *Moniteur universel*, Théophile Gautier passed over to it, and continued till his last hour the enervating task which for so long had become insupportable to him. He saw himself

8vo, 495 and 602 pages, 2,370 numbers. In Vol. I., from page 1 to 94, I have restored the titles of the different journals and keepsakes in which Théophile Gautier wrote before he went on to the *Presse.* It seemed to me that it might be interesting to reproduce that nomenclature which can only awaken very few memories in our day. *Le Gastronome, le Mercure de France du XIXe siècle, le Cabinet de lecture, l'Almanach des Muses, la France littéraire, les Annales romantiques, le Voleur, le Diamant, le Sélam, l'Amulette, le Journal des gens du monde, la France industrielle, la Vieille Pologne, l'Églantine, le Monde dramatique, l'Abeille, le Rameau d'or, la Chronique de Paris, l'Ariel.* According to a family tradition Théophile Gautier made his *début* in prose-writing, in the *Gastronome*, March 24, 1831, by *un Repas au désert d'Égypte*, an anonymous article that M. Spoelberch de Lovenjoul reproduces without guaranteeing its authenticity.

condemned for thirty-six years to give an account of the pieces played in the Paris theatres, and to write dissertations on the pictures and statues that filled the public exhibitions. Death alone set him free; it was indeed too much.

In Alfred de Vigny's *Stello*, the Lord Mayor says to Chatterton: "I remember this phrase of Ben Jonson, and I give it you for truth, 'Know that the finest muse in the world will not keep a man, and that these ladies may be our mistresses, never our wives.'" Poor Gautier knew it; his legitimate wife was criticism—a prudent match—which brought him for a marriage portion dramatic articles. He lived upon it, at least he managed to subsist, but we can affirm that more than one poem thereby perished, not having time to be born. He never consoled himself for this, and usually compared himself to a racehorse harnessed to a rubble cart. The cart was the daily drudgery, full of vaudevilles, buffooneries, bad singers, and heavy dramas, which he had to go through at stated hours under pain of fasting, and compelling his family to fast too. One day he said to me, with the melancholy smile which was habitual to him, "I believe I am the legitimate heir of 'Gautier the penniless.' He has left me his poverty and his ill-luck. Like him, I have neither fief nor a

full pocket; like him, I have conducted the crusade towards the Holy Land of literature; and like him, I shall die by the way without even seeing from afar the Jerusalem of my dreams."

His first article was devoted to the decorative paintings that Eugène Delacroix was just completing in the Chamber of Deputies. He thus continued the art criticisms, in which he became a master, and in which he had already made a trial of his powers in some of the literary journals of the day. He rapidly acquired considerable notoriety, and in the artistic world exercised an authority that it often had to submit to. In the salon of 1837, with a spirit that showed the sincerity of his convictions, he attacked bourgeois art, "the pot-boiling art" as they said then, in which Drolling with his well-polished kettles, Mallebranche with his snow effects, and Louis Ducis with his troubadours, had gained some renown. Wishing to strike at the root of things, he attacked Paul Delaroche, already celebrated and much admired for his *Enfants d'Édouard*, 1831; *Richelieu sur le Rhône; Mazarin mourant; Cromwell*, 1832; *Jane Grey*, 1834. With regard to *Charles Ier insulté par des soldats dans un corps de garde* he treated it with a severity that was excessive. While recognising that the judicious choice of his subjects determined Paul Delaroche's success much more than the art with

which they were treated; admitting that his aspirations did not rise above the earth, that the simple reproduction of some fact in history does not constitute historical painting, we may yet acknowledge that the artist's talents, often cold it is true, and sometimes a little dull, merited less severe treatment. The heat of the battle was not yet extinguished, that is their excuse; they wrangled still in the name of the Romanticist school, thrust aside without reserve by the Academy of Fine Arts, and which only with the greatest difficulty forced a way into the annual salons in face of the determined resolution to close it against them. If Théophile Gautier's criticism in this case overstepped the bounds, it is only just to remember that he was the champion of a cause that was being fought to the death, that his adversaries were not only numerous but in a powerful position, and that in spite of his agility, his valour, and his strength, he was unable to return blow for blow. Besides, might he not have said with the poet Feuchtersleben: "I have always detested mediocrity, that is why during my youth I was often seized with a hatred of moderation." At that time Paul Delaroche was often compared to Casimir Delavigne. Without being disrespectful towards their memory we may admit that they were wanting, both of them, in that originality and

the requisite exaggeration that Romanticism demanded from its disciples. Later, in 1858, two years after the death of the painter, Gautier made the *amende honorable:* "In former times," he said, "we maltreated Paul Delaroche rather roughly. That was at a period when art disputes were fought with sharp weapons and to the bitter end." [1]

The Fine Art Exhibitions were only opened once in the year, so that it was dramatic criticisms, continually fed by the incessant productions at the theatres, that was to be Théophile Gautier's most exacting occupation. Before confiding it to him *la Presse* had made several trials which did not seem to be successful. Wishing to make a new departure from the pedantic school of criticism, encumbered with canons and systems which Geoffroy, Hoffmann, and Duviquet had established, they had successively appealed to Alexandre Dumas, Frédéric Soulié, Granier de Cassagnac, and at last to Gérard de Nerval in collaboration with Théophile Gautier. They signed themselves G. G. to parody the J. J. of Jules Janin, who remained in sole charge of the *feuilleton* on the *Journal des Débats*, which at one time he had shared with Lœve Veimars, after the retirement of Duviquet.

[1] See Théophile Gautier's *Portraits contemporains*, 1 volume in 16mo, 1886, Charpentier, page 291 and the following.

Gérard de Nerval was of a nomadic temperament with vagrant instincts, he could not tie himself down to any labour which required a certain amount of regularity. Théophile Gautier, more sedentary, remained alone on the ground floor of the offices of the *Presse* journal to instruct the public upon the literary value of pieces which most often had none.

At this trade—for it was a trade to him and nothing more—he displayed powers of the first order, and several of his articles, which are veritable master-pieces, remain hidden away and as though lost in the midst of the daily "copy" which he was obliged to produce. On this point he did not deceive himself in the least, and said:

"A book alone has importance and lasts, the newspaper disappears and is forgotten. Étienne Bequet wrote the criticisms for the *Journal des Débats* for fifteen years, and who knows anything about them to-day? But all the world has read and will continue to read *le Mouchoir bleu*, a thin little book of not more than twenty pages. The newspaper article is a shrub that loses its leaves every evening and never bears any fruit."

Without exaggeration we may say that during his whole existence as dramatic critic he wrote his articles in discouragement if not with disgust.

This is easy to understand, he was like a nightingale in a cage; every time that he wished to soar and to sing under the free heaven, his work held him back and forced him to drone through the ballad in the fifth act, or the marriage song of the leading gentleman espousing the leading lady. More than once—and I cannot blame him for it—he got some sympathizing friend to undertake this task for him, who gladly took up his chains to relieve him of their weight. If he had been less tied down, if he could have chosen his subjects instead of being obliged to take those that were given to him, he might have added something of value to the work he did. He had already given a proof of what his historical knowledge, his taste for our old literature, his discerning mind would have allowed him to do. If instead of hurrying over two thousand newspaper articles Théophile Gautier, while lending an ear to the muse whom he adored, had had leisure to write a history of French literature, what a pleasure it would have been for men of taste, what a treasure for scholars, what good luck for all the world! Judging by what he had accomplished since the age of twenty-three, we can estimate what he would have done in the maturity of his knowledge and intelligence.

On the 1st of December, 1833, Théophile Gautier signed a treaty with Charles Malo,

director of *la France littéraire*, by which he engaged "to compose a series of articles under the title of *Exhumations littéraires*. This series is to form a complete study of the old French poets . . . and to consist of a dozen articles. . . . M. Charles Malo promises to pay for these twelve articles, as they are delivered to him by M. Gautier, at the rate of 50 francs [£2] an article." These twelve articles, collected in two volumes 8vo, forming altogether 677 pages, were published in 1844, under the title *les Grotesques*. We perceive that at that period of art and revival, literature was not remunerative as the economists say. Eleven of these articles appeared successively in *la France littéraire* during the years 1834–35. The twelfth and last—*Paul Scarron*—was inserted in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* on July 15, 1844.[1] *Les Grotesques* represent Théophile Gautier's *début* in serious criticism, and on this account possess an importance which must not be overlooked. I said serious criticism, and I do not retract it, for serious does not mean tiresome, knowledge does not imply pedantry; we can be clever with humour and serious with originality. I consider it to be an excellent book, and have just re-read it for perhaps the tenth time, with as much pleasure and interest as though I did not know it.

[1] Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, No. 93 to 711.

Unless he intended to hide an irony under it, the title is irritating, not easily understood, and does not apply to the work it indicates. It betrays too many of the literary opinions that "authorized" critics still upheld in Gautier's youth, when it was bad form not to treat as rubbish the poets anterior to Malherbe, whom Boileau's *l'Art poétique* had condemned. Gautier without doubt came under the influence of surrounding ideas, which, however, were not his own. If in spite of their spirit, Georges de Scudéry and Cyrano de Bergerac are unpleasing from their attitude of bullies of the pen and sword, if Chapelain is heavy and rugged, if Guillaume Colletet is insipid, if Saint-Amant's comedy is too forced; François Villon and Théophile de Viau are poets with whom literary history must reckon, and Scarron occasionally pushes scurrility to a point of burlesque vigour unknown before him. I can only see Scalion de Virbluneau and Pierre de Saint-Louis who are absolutely grotesque, and worthy of the epithet, which should have been spared to the others. The choice of this title astonishes us on the part of Gautier, who has said more than once: "It needs a good bit of talent even to write a mediocre book, or paint a bad picture."

At the beginning of the study on François Villon he nevertheless does not conceal his

preferences while seeming to excuse himself for following them.

"It is only," he says, "on the dungheap that pearls are found, witness Ennius. For my part I would rather have the old Roman's pearls than all the gold of Virgil; it needs a pretty big pile of gold to be worth a small handful of pearls. I find a singular pleasure in unearthing a fine verse in an unknown poet; it seems to me that his poor shade must be comforted, and rejoice to see his thought understood at last; it is a rehabilitation that I undertake, it is an act of justice that I render. And if at times my praises for some obscure poets may seem to certain of my readers exaggerated, let them remember that I praise them for all those who have abused them beyond measure, and that unmerited contempt provokes and justifies excessive panegyric."

The praises that Gautier distributes in the course of his studies on *les Grotesques* have nothing in them to offend us, which proves perhaps, that the poets studied by him are better known in our day than they were about 1834, when the murmur of the applause lavished upon Mme. Dufresnoy and Luce de Lancival was still echoing, and Béranger—the modern Tyrteus, as they said—was looked upon as the greatest poet that had ever honoured a nation.

What strikes us in this book is its moderation, which appears almost extraordinary when we recall those years of strife in which the Romanticists and the Classicists used to hurl at each other whatever insults came handy, and turned controversy into a scratching match. We might say that Gautier was already in possession of a sort of superior serenity, which allowed him to abstract himself from transitory passions, in order the better to understand and point out the beautiful wherever it came from and wherever he found it. The style is clear, of irreproachable accuracy, with nothing strained about it, like that in which Sainte-Beuve delighted later, without any of those mental reservations, those half-expressed thoughts, in which writers whose habitual work is criticism love to envelop and often to obscure their meaning. Not for a moment is his candour at fault. He deceives no one, neither himself nor others; he is absolutely sincere, as well when he laughs at the stupidities of Sieur de Virbluneau as when he brings to light the high attainments of Théophile de Viau, or is surprised, *apropos* of Chapelain's *Pucelle*, that such a subject, so complete, so wonderful, should only have produced works of deplorable inferiority, and a degradation unworthy of an author and a respectable language.

"What marvels there were," he says, "in that life, so short and so full, we seem rather to be reading a legend than a chronicle. There is in it material for a *romancero.* Well, with so magnificent a subject, and a real heroine, who leaves far behind her the Camilla of Virgil, the Bradamantes, the Marphises, the Clorindas, and all the beautiful amazons of the Italian epics, Chapelain could only make a dull article in verse, as wearisome as life, and Voltaire but an infamous obscenity, abominable in intention and singularly mediocre even of its wretched kind. Poor Joan of Arc! The English only burnt thee, they did not outrage thee."

One phrase should be remembered in the passage which I have just quoted, for it contains some advice—precious advice—that the future poets of Joan of Arc would do well to meditate upon: "There is in it material for a *romancero.*"

This study of poets, scorned and too long left in oblivion, presents the peculiarity of being done in an impersonal manner, and with a very clear historical intelligence. Certainly Théophile Gautier is of his day, he has neither cut his hair nor laid aside the famous red waistcoat. From certain allusions and sarcasms we recognize the adept convicted of new theories; but it is not by virtue of these theories that he judges the authors of whom he speaks, for they did not exist in the day of their celebrity. He

did not see in Molière a predecessor of the French Revolution, and Malherbe did not appear to him at all as a defender of "the throne and altar." He appreciated their works according to the ideas—errors or truths—in vogue in their time. He is sparing in comment, mocks at stupidity, makes much of talent, and does not as so many critics do, strive to discover in what the poet has said what the poet did not mean to say. In a word, he never falls into the absurdity of judging ancestors according to the tendencies and aptitudes of their great-grand-nephews. To make up for it he took much account of social surroundings, history, and even stories. He knew that the writer and the public react upon one another, and did not deny the often tyrannical power of fashion. With his usual sagacity, too, he recognised the influence exercised by foreign literature over French literature, which became Spanish or Italian according to the day, before entering into the false Greek and Latin traditions, from which Romanticism has at last delivered it.

He not only made a rapid though complete analysis of the principal works of his poets, but drew them themselves from head to foot with so clear a stroke that we might think it was done from nature. François Villon, with his manners of a vagabond "of the lesser light,"

without a care provided his glass was full, and thinking at times with melancholy of the rope that will know his weight; Cyrano, his moustache turned up under his enormous nose, and his sword drawn; Chapelain, showing "his austere grave face with a few scientific wrinkles full of Greek and Latin, wrinkles which resemble the leaves of a book;" Scarron doubled up, laughing when his sufferings did not draw groans from him, nursed by his wife, the beautiful Françoise d'Aubigné, who will be Queen of France, and will regret her "squalor" in the midst of the splendours of Versailles. There they all are spouting their poems, reciting their sonnets to Chloris, declaiming their tirades, mouthing their parodies, and as they pass before the reader he is astonished at their resemblance although he has never seen them, so alive are they under the pen whose art resuscitated them.

His literary integrity was equal to his accuracy. In spite of his deference towards the great masters, even those whose genius has commanded the admiration of centuries, he never hesitated to strip them of certain thefts into which they had allowed themselves to be drawn, and which he restored to those who had been the victims of them. On this subject he made a kind of profession of faith which it is

well to remember. As though wishing to give it more force, he addresses himself directly to his readers :—

"You have doubtless heard it said that the galley scene in the *Fourberies de Scapin* was imitated from Cyrano de Bergerac, but it is less probable that you have unearthed it where it is in *le Pédant joué ;* read that, and in spite of all the respect we owe to the great Molière, say if it is not the most impudent plagiarism that could be imagined; it is, besides, not the only plagiarism that Molière had to reproach himself with, for if we consulted ancient tapestries and Italian novelists, such for example as the *Nuits facétieuses* of Signor Straparole, there would remain to the master of the French language very little on the side of invention, nor would there be any more in Shakespeare's works. It is a very singular thing, which becomes, through the investigations of science, more notorious from day to day, that the men whom we agree in calling geniuses have really invented nothing, strictly speaking, and that all their imagination and their gifts are to be found often in writers who are either mediocre, obscure, or detestable. Wherein, then, lies the difference? In the style and character, which after all are the only things that constitute the great artist, for all the world is able to find an incident or a poetical idea, but very few are capable of realising it, and rendering it in a manner to be understood by others."

Having said this he quotes the scene from the *Pédant joué*, which it cannot be denied inspired Molière to write his scene in the *Fourberies de Scapin.* In comparing one with the other we see what an amusing idea, invented by a clever man, becomes under the pen of a man of genius. Théophile Gautier is right, the scene is immortal, not because it was invented by Cyrano de Bergerac, but because it was arranged, developed, and put in its right place by Molière. The idea is the same, the essential phrase, so often repeated, "*Qu' allait-il faire dans cette galère,*" is the same, but in truth the two scenes do not resemble each other any more than the *Pédant joué* resembles the *Fourberies de Scapin.*

Molière picked up an idea in Cyrano de Bergerac's medley, and made a masterpiece of it. Scarron took a legend which had passed into a fable and made a farce of it. The vague memory of a sort of prehistoric Jacquerie, transmitted from generation to generation, remains simply an oral tradition, until one day Hesiod takes it up and bestows immortality upon it in his *Théogony*, which must have made Euhemerus smile. Later, when the Latin tongue is already in its decadence, Claudian is tempted by this subject, and dedicates his poem the *Gigantomachia* to it, of which only a few frag-

ments remain to us. In his turn Paul Scarron takes possession of the war of giants, and with his mind, which was as crooked as his body, under the title of *Typhon*, turns it into a harlequinade worthy of the booth of a mountebank at a fair, to which level it sank never to rise again. Théophile Gautier made an analysis of this harlequinade, which is a model of straightforwardness, spirit and liveliness. It may well surprise us that Scarron, whose sufferings were such,

> "That he wept like a calf, very often like two,
> Sometimes like four,"

could forget himself sufficiently to overflow thus "in pleasant verses, an original manner of saying things, and in idioms savouring of the soil;" but while sufficiently in love with his poem he would have envied the spirited prose, the good humour, the charming gaiety with which Gautier has treated the "sons of earth" whom his verses have turned into ridicule. The chapters of *les Grotesques* are besides full of keen insight, light touches, and little historical pictures painted by the hand of a master. There is a touch of raillery in the good-humour at times, but it is full of the natural courtesy due to lofty efforts of the mind. More than one of "these placards," as

Estienne Pasquier would have said, ought to be given in a literature course, as an example of intelligent criticism, written with a thorough knowledge of the matter, courteous in form, just without being arrogant, and learned without being pedantic.

Some years after publishing *les Grotesques* he had the intention of making a sequel to it, by writing a series of detached articles on the predecessors of Corneille—on Desmazures, Grévin, Jean de la Taille, and Robert Garnier, of whom he liked to recite a verse borrowed from the *Bradamante*,

"Roulant mes libres jours en libre pauvreté,"[1]

and chiefly on Montchrétien, whom he admired while pitying him for the unmerited oblivion in which his works are shrouded. The man's life stimulated him; he wished to write it, for he would have found matter in it for the reconstitution of that valiant life of the sixteenth century, which pleased him above all others.

He appreciated him as a tragic poet; the verses of the *Lécènes* did not leave him indifferent; *l'Ecossaise* astonished him by the boldness of its author, who, eighteen years after the execution on February 18, 1587, dared to put

[1] Roving my free days in free poverty.

upon the stage the death of Mary Stuart; *Aman* interested him, perhaps because of what Racine, with little taste, borrowed from it for his *Esther*, going so far as to copy one verse word for word:

"L'insolent devant moi ne se courba jamais."[1]

However, what attracted him most strongly towards Montchrétien was the adventurer, the assassin, the fugitive, the renegade, the leader, who was to die at the market-town of Tourailles at the age of forty-six, killed with halberds and musket shots, by the seigneur Claude Turgot, one of the ancestors of the too ephemeral minister of Louis XVI. Gautier promised himself some pleasure, and felt some pride in pointing out, document in hand, that the Sieur Antoine Montchrétien de Vatteville was the first author who wrote a *Traicté de l'œconomie politique*, thus creating that word which was to be so much abused later. It was a starting-point that would have allowed of making incursions amongst the new social theories, and Gautier would not have failed in it, for, out of curiosity, he had not studied, but glanced through the works of those who had been called modern gods. We very often conversed together about this series of subjects, which, treated by him,

[1] The insolent wretch will never bow down before me.

would have been of great interest, and was to have formed a set of articles intended for the new *Revue de Paris* (1851). This project was never carried out. In 1852 Théophile Gautier started for Constantinople, and the predecessors of Corneille went to rejoin the many other dreams which were never realised.

It would have been a masterly work, written with special care, as though to console him for the worries of his daily work on the paper. The more he felt himself enervated, lowered, by this labour, which the mediocrity of the subjects that he was forced to embroider upon rendered insipid, so much the more soothing would it have been to take an entire literary period, to explain it as a whole, as well as in detail, and to make of it one of those vigorous studies in which he excelled. The task would have been worthy of his talent, like that offered to him in 1867, and which he accepted with joy, though it was more limited than he desired. It was at the opening of the Universal Exhibition, each section of which it was composed—a dazzling array of works of art and industry—was to address to the proper minister a report on the progress made during a certain number of years. It was thought only just not to leave literature without anything to show its vitality, and Théophile Gautier was charged by the minister of Public

Instruction to draw up a memorandum on poetry in France since 1848.[1]

In two words, the Government wished to have a report on French poetry since the election of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte to the first magistracy of the French Republic. They would not have been sorry to be able to demonstrate that French literature had developed gloriously under the presidency of Louis Bonaparte, and during the fifteen first years of the reign of Napoleon III. If such was the hope of the chiefs of the day that hope was disappointed, for Théophile Gautier, while not forgetting his usual courtesy, was quite frank and outspoken. He made no compromise with his literary convictions, either to attack established reputations, or to serve his own interests. Perhaps this was not without danger for him. He had in a way a situation as licensed critic to the *Journal officiel*, and that situation might be taken from him by caprice or ill-will; but he did not take this into account, and spoke with as much sincerity as though his report were not intended to appear until after his death.

This memorandum, which was added to the

[1] This memorandum is entitled *les Progrès de la poésie française depuis* 1830, but it only determines the part played by poetry in French literature since the revolution of 1848. It consists of 106 pages of print which were added to the *Histoire du romantisme*, 1 vol. 16mo. Charpentier, Paris, 1854.

collection of reports on the Universal Exhibition of 1867, is a *résumé* of the poetical experiments made in France since the throne of Louis Philippe had been declared vacant by the second republic. First comes a list of authors and their works, then a succint analysis, a short criticism, and here and there some excellent advice. Courtesy is never wanting to it, is unremitting, and there is something paternal about it, as is fitting when a master speaks. We must not be misled by this, however, and see in it a proof of dulness, or indifference. Under its always courteous form, willingly toned down for fear of wounding, his opinion remains unshaken ; it appears between the lines, and shows itself sufficiently to be recognized and leave intact the impartiality of the critic, who never hesitates to blame where he thinks it right to do so, but who does it with so much delicacy, such skilful prudence, and touching precautions, that his restrictions are only the more eloquent. He knew from long experience the *genus irritabile vatum*, and treated it, from sympathy as much as from good nature, as one would do a sick person to whom any shock is painful.

1867 ! it seems to me as though it were only yesterday, and that once again I see that imperial procession pass along which now has vanished into the kingdom of shadows ! In

reading Théophile Gautier's report I seemed to be present at a funeral review, to the roll-call of names, the echoes answered so many times—dead! King Death has not rested from his labour since that time, he has made a select choice, has respected no one, not those that had glory, nor those that had hope, no one, not even the poet, who undertook to speak of the poets of his day. Let us pass on, without forgetting, without challenging regret; but pass on we must, for it is not a *De Profundis* that it becomes us to chant here.

To appreciate the merit of works which appeared during fifteen years, sprung from diverse tendencies, and often from opposite temperaments, Théophile Gautier makes appeal to no æsthetics, to no theory; he leaves on one side every preconceived idea, rejects whatever would be *à priori*, and remain abstract, that is to say, free from all influence of the school. He is always a Romanticist, but he judges of the poetry by the poet, steeps himself in it, explains it, and assigns to it its own particular character. In a word, to use a slang expression of the green-room, *il entre dans la peau du bonhomme*.[1] He does for his contemporaries what he did for his grotesques; he is careful not to overshadow them with his ideas, and respects them even in

[1] He gets inside his man.

what appears to him their errors. If sometimes he sins a little on the side of indulgence, it is in favour of some companion of his youth, a combatant in those forgotten struggles, to whom he accords an eulogium which is but a remembrance of the "good times." Sainte-Beuve, whose inferiority, considered as a poet, is incontestible, has profited by this tenderness, so natural towards old friends who come together again after a long absence. If Théophile Gautier has strewn a few too many flowers on the grave where sleep the *Poésies de Joseph Delorme*, the *Consolations*, the *Pensées d'août*, we must not blame him for it, for they were due to the author of the *Portraits littéraires*, the *Causeries du Lundi*, and to the historian of Port-Royal.

It is to André Chénier that Théophile Gautier traces the starting-point of modern poetry in France. Without discussing this opinion, which might lead to controversy, it is certain that the the posthumous works of him who has said :

"Sur des pensers nouveaux faisons des vers antiques."[1]

were a good deal talked about when they were published by H. de la Touche in 1819.

"All the worthless sham poetry lost colour and fell into dust. A shadow was cast rapidly upon

[1] Let us write on new thoughts in old measures.

names which had been brilliant a short time before, and all eyes were turned towards the new dawn. De Vigny brought out his *Poèmes antiques et modernes;* Lamartine, his *Méditations;* Victor Hugo, his *Odes et Ballades*, and soon Sainte-Beuve came to join the group with the *Poésies de Joseph Delorme*, and Alfred de Musset with the *Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie.*"

I have quoted this passage because it is explicit, and contains Gautier's whole method in dealing with the revival of French poetry. Nevertheless, I will allow myself to make one observation: Lamartine wrote *le Lac* in 1817, at Aix-les-Bains, two years before the appearance of André Chénier's volume of verses, consequently outside any influence which they might have exercised upon his inspiration and his talent.

After a rapid glance at the sources of the poetry which flourished after the convulsion of February, 1848, Théophile Gautier enters upon the special epoch to which he was to limit himself, and he quotes with just appreciation the authors who honoured it. While acknowledging their individual merit, he traces back their source to the great streams with which their Romanticist forefathers fertilised the exhausted soil, where French poetry found nothing to reap but fruits without flavour, and flowers without perfume. He is not reproaching them, for he says:

"Originality is only the personal note added to the common foundation prepared by our contemporaries or immediate predecessors." These poets, almost all of the generation to which I belonged, and who were still in their first youth at the moment of the downfall of the July monarchy; these late comers of the school of 1830, already held in check by the so-called school of common-sense; these worshippers of the modern Muse, who swore only by Hugo, Byron, Goethe, and Alfred de Musset, I knew them for the most part, loved, admired, when they started in life, full of illusions and brilliant hopes which have not always been realised. More than one has gone without giving forth what he promised; others hide themselves behind the folds of a veil which resembles a shroud; above some of them I still see the aureole that surrounded them in the first days of their renown. The stroke with which Gautier draws them makes their figures stand out, and with rare insight sets forth the particular characteristics of their talent. I recognise them, they are just as I saw them in the old days. There is Théodore de Banville, whose "ideas like fairy princesses wander about the emerald fields in robes the colour of the weather, of the sun, and of the moon;" there is the Marquis de Belloy, elegant of figure but rather indistinct, as though his thoughts grew

thin under the tissue of his carefully-chosen words, and his brother in letters, the Comte de Gramont, who in his *Chants du passé* combines the correct bearing of a gentleman with the haughtiness of unshaken convictions, and Pierre Dupont, whose couplets were celebrated when he sang *les Bœufs*, and whose refrains were insupportable, when drunken voices yelled forth, *Les peuples sont pour nous des frères.* He was applauded; he was illustrious; he could believe himself to be as they told him he was, "the Béranger of his time"—Alas!

"Je n'ai fait que passer, il n'etait déjà plus." [1]

"A shadow," said Théophile Gautier, "descended upon the brow on which popularity seemed to have placed an eternal laurel wreath."

In speaking of Leconte de Lisle and, as was just, praising his verses, which were cast in the purest metal, regarding him "as one of the strongest poetical individualities produced in this last period," he approves of those who attempt to imitate him, "for," he says, "he who has not been a disciple will never be a master, and whatever may be said poetry is an art to be learnt, which has its own methods, its formulas, its arcanums, its counter-point, and its harmonies." This is, in other words,

[1] I only passed by, he was no more.

the opinion that Gautier often expressed in my presence: "No one who has not begun by imitating will ever be original." This opinion, absolutely sincere, uttered by a man whose originality was unquestionable, always astonished me.

The *Poèmes antiques* of Leconte de Lisle call up, by a natural transition, Théophile Gautier's opinion on *Melænis*, a poem, the subject of which is borrowed from the Rome of the Cæsars, and which is worthy of the praises he bestows upon it. Louis Bouilhet was a poet indeed, a poet in the strong acceptation of the word, so much so that prose was repugnant to him, and verse a kind of compulsion, which he could not escape from. All his life he was drawn different ways between two inclinations that contradicted each other in him, and which he never succeeded in making agree. His taste, I may say his passion, drew him towards the Romanticist school and kept him there, while his training was essentially classical. I was intimately connected with him, and was often a witness of the struggle that went on in his mind between the two adverse muses. He was the best classical scholar I have known, I do not even except those who learn in order to teach Greek and Latin. Classics had hidden none of their grandeur from him; he understood them with an intel-

ligence that I have never seen equalled. His tendency was always towards Homer, Aristophanes, Plautus and Horace, but when he set to work—poetry, detached poems, plays—it was always towards an imitation of Hugo that he felt himself attracted. There resulted sometimes a certan dissonance which the beauty of the verses, and the fulness of the imagery, quickly make us forget. He has given us a master-piece—*Melænis*, which dates from his twenty-sixth year, and which alone will suffice to glorify his memory. Unfortunately the poem is written "in those stanzas of six verses and triple rhymes which the author of *Namouna* often made use of, and we regret it," says Gautier, "as this purely metrical resemblance has led to the belief of an imitation, voluntary or involuntary, of Alfred de Musset, and never were two poets less alike. Bouilhet's style is robust and ornate, picturesque, full of local colour; it abounds in verses, full, vigorous, expansive, dashed off on the instant." Louis Bouilhet died at the age of forty-seven, at the moment when the maturity of his talent and the repose of his existence prompted him to new work. He departed like a star that disappears before having expended its full brightness.

Thus all the poets defile before us one after the other, more at the fancy of the writer than

according to any chronological order, all indicated by their chief works, and distinguished by a just word which has the value of a description. Satirists like Amédée Pommier, who was a singularly vigorous versifier; ghoulish stirrers-up of the unclean, like Baudelaire, who anticipated the pessimism of our day, and made admirable verses to celebrate the moral deformities of humanity; fastidious creatures like Joséphin Soulary, who cuts his sonnets upon the transparence of a sardonyx; nostalgists like Lacaussade, who regrets the creole country where his infancy was passed, and many others who tried to forget the things of earth in listening to and repeating voices from above. He forgets no one, not even the author of the *Chants modernes*, to whom, in his good-nature and friendship he gives, not without gentleness, a well-deserved lesson.

In the course of this rapid history of modern poetry, the justness of his mind redoubled in perspicacity, and he became a prophet. Let us not forget that the following was written in 1867, that is to say, twenty-six years ago.

"Although," he writes, "Sully Prudhomme habitually confines his subjects within narrow frames, his brush is large enough to allow him to undertake big frescoes. The *Étables d'Augias* which we can read

in the *Parnasse contemporain*, is traced with the certainty of touch, the simplicity of tone, and breadth of style of a mural painting. This poem might be added to the other labours o Hercules on the *cella* or *pronaos* of a Greek temple. If he perseveres for some years longer, and does not abandon for prose, or any other profitable occupation, an art forsaken by public attention, Sully Prudhomme seems to us to be destined to take front rank among the poets of latest years, and he will reap his reward as though he had been at work since the dawn." [1]

Arrived almost at the end of the *Rapport sur les progrès de la poésie française*, the reader is filled with anxiety; he asks himself whether certain works which have appeared since 1848 are to be deliberately passed over in silence, and whether one of the greatest of modern names is not to be mentioned at all. The suspense is legitimate, we have arrived at the year 1867. The empire it is true has already become somewhat modified by the wear and tear of its own machinery, and in default of liberty we have tolerance; the administration is less brutal, justice more indulgent; but Napoleon III. is on the throne, and those about him have not forgotten *les Châtiments*, and they also remember *Napoléon le Petit*. In the official

[1] *Histoire du romantisme*, pp. 336, 337.

world they smile disdainfully in speaking of Victor Hugo, and say of him that he is only a poet of the decadence, and in the world of "the court" they drop their eyes with shame when they hear his name mentioned. To quote him is bad form, to praise him may appear perilous, at least unseemly. Now Théophile Gautier, commissioned with a work by the Minister of Public Instruction, was, in a way, a delegate of the Government, bound to deal gently with certain susceptibilities, and to espouse court quarrels. Will he from prudence, or, perhaps, merely from expediency, forget his old master in literature, and sacrifice the exiled poet to the Throne? Let us reassure ourselves, Théophile Gautier was incapable of such a crime, everything in him would have revolted against it, his Romanticist faith, his loyalty, his nature, even if the perspective of an official post was to be the prize—the thirty pieces of his abjuration.

"We have in this study," he says, "devoted ourselves to new faces, and given them an important place, for after all it was they whom it was a question of making known. But during that space of time the masters did not keep silence. Victor Hugo brought out his *Contemplations*, the *Légende des siècles*, and the *Chansons des rues et des bois*, three works of the highest significance."

This is only the beginning of things, and Gautier goes on to speak of the poet, as never courtier spoke of a potentate with the crown on his head and ermine mantle on his shoulders. There is no servility about it however, only the expression of an admiration that could not be contained. The *Légende des siècles* draws from him cries of enthusiasm, and never was homage rendered to genius more justified. These two volumes have stirred to the profoundest depths the hearts of those who love poetry.

In Victor Hugo's work they are the examples of a supreme effort, in which even the faults become perfections, and the imperfect metre gives to the whole a tremendous force; words seem all at once to acquire more precise meaning, more lofty, more grandiose, with such art are they employed, and such power. This book is without a precedent, nevertheless the embryo of it is to be found in *les Burgraves*, which would have been an admirable poem, if it had not been an ill-composed drama in which the action is lost sight of in the speeches. For my part I know nothing more beautiful in French poetry than these "little epic poems, concentrated, rapid, generalizing in a small space the colour and the character of a century or a country."

In this work Victor Hugo inaugurated a new manner, larger, more human, than that of the *Orientales*, and the *Feuilles d'automne*. He did not, like Dante, visit the infernal regions, but he ran through the catacombs of religions and history, where he discovered hidden treasures, brought them to the light of day, and presented to literary France the most beautiful gift she ever received. Gautier tells all this in excellent style. However eulogistic it may be the account is just; for praise could hardly rise to the height of the work which he is describing. I am not surprised either that after having briefly explained the subject of *la Trompette du jugement dernier*, Gautier should have written: "It seems that the poet in that region where there is neither form, nor colour, nor light, nor shade, nor limit, must have heard and noted the mysterious whisperings of the Infinite."[1]

[1] In this same report Théophile Gautier has written: "It has been remarked that Victor Hugo, the great craftsman of metres, the man to whom all forms, all shapes, all rhythms are familiar, has never made any sonnets; Goethe also abstained for a long time from this form of verse, these two eagles not wishing doubtless, to imprison themselves in so narrow a cage. However, Goethe gave in and tardily composed a sonnet which was an event in German literature." Since then Victor Hugo has imitated Goethe, he also has made a sonnet—a single one—and has dedicated it to Judith Gautier, who is, as every one knows, Théo's daughter.

Théophile Gautier ends his report by saying: "What conclusion is to be drawn from this long work on poetry? It is an embarrassing question. Among all these poets whose works we have analyzed, which of them will write his name on the glorious and holy page of fame—Lamartine, Victor Hugo, Alfred de Musset? Time alone can answer." But why make a choice? If their qualities are different, their genius is akin. Lamartine's natural gift equals the magnificence of Hugo, which does not yield to the humane sympathy of Musset; I repeat, Why should we choose? The door that opens upon posterity is wide enough to allow three contemporary poets to pass through abreast.

Les Grotesques and the *Rapport sur les progrès de la poésie*, are, as criticisms, Gautier's two chief works, those which he was able to write in peace, without being harassed by the flight of time, by the printer's devil clamouring for copy, and by the necessities of the "making-up." This sisyphus-like labour that cut up and empoisoned his life produced an enormous number of articles which M. Spoelberch de Lovenjoul has reproduced in his work with religious care. It is not without sadness that we see upon how many subjects that were unworthy of him Théophile Gautier was obliged to waste his talent. Certainly at the theatre, and at the Fine Art

exhibitions, he met with more than one bit of good luck, by which his intelligence profited; but on the other hand what mean things, what stupidities, what dulness, were imposed upon him, stealing from him the hours that poetry demanded! And he ended, too, by hating his work, never setting about it till the last moment, like a sick person who recoils before the moment of the operation.

He never, however, in his articles, wrung with so sad an effort from his weariness, showed himself sullen or irritated. He accomplished his task with good will, like a good workman, a master in literature, as he was. His criticism was always courteous, and his respect for the public irreproachable, respect for the public and for himself, for the language he was speaking, for the good breeding from which, pen in hand, he never swerved.

He did not escape any of the unpleasantness, not to put it more strongly, which assail the critic, the unfortunate man always under fire, always in a state of siege, the distributor of reputations, who has his pass into all the theatres, and can by his praise make a market for a work of art, and who for all this has only to give a stroke of his pen—a simple stroke of his pen. If I could only lay before the eyes of the public the files of letters that I have had in my hands,

they would see that no queen's favourite, or all-powerful minister, was ever more harassed with importunities than the unhappy Gautier. There wasn't a painter, a sculptor, an actor, a ballad writer, an acrobat, a trainer of circus horses, who did not write to ask him for his support. They address him as "Dear and Illustrious Master," or simply as "Dear Monsieur Gauthier," with the irritating "h" added to his celebrated name. They ask him to come to the studio to see the picture or statue destined for the next salon, and those who receive a refusal call upon gods and men to witness the injustice of which they are the victims. The haughtiest of them, those who profess independence, and who later will trample on the trophies of our history, bow as low, lower even than the others. Courbet writes to him: "If I devote myself to art, it is in the first place to try to live by it, and in the second to merit the criticisms of a few men like yourself who can the better appreciate my progress for having taken some pains to cure me of my faults." He complains of being badly placed at the salon, and desires that his picture should "fall more within range of the *naked eye*." He would be happy if Gautier would receive him, and honour him with some advice. Every one with any sort of a name, and under whatever pretext, begs him not to refuse them "two or three lines, not

more"; and all the people who wish to go to the theatre without having to open their purses—which is a mania among the rich—beg theatre tickets from him: "it is so easy for you."

And the actor, he whom he has described in his study on Scudéry in the *Grotesques:* "the man who only expresses thoughts foreign to his own, who lives upon the love and the passion that are made for him, who breathes not a sigh that is not arranged beforehand, makes not a movement that is not artificial," is no less eager for the puff—there is no other name for it. Can praise, however exaggerated it may be, satisfy and correspond to the opinion which he has of himself? Never, we fear. On this subject I found in the fragments of correspondence that Gautier left behind him a valuable proof which shows how far the unreasonableness of certain illusions can go. After a revival of *Robert Macaire* Théophile Gautier wrote a succinct review of it in which he mentioned Frédérick Lemaître with praise, without, however, comparing him to Plutarch's heroes, whereupon a writer, younger than himself, but who treated him a little too much as a comrade, without taking into account the difference in their age and talent, wrote him a letter, certain parts of which must be given word for word:

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—I saw Frédérick Lemaître yesterday, who is very much perturbed by the manner in which the critics have taken *Robert Macaire*. Your article, in particular, hit him hard, for you have only said a few passing words about him. I am so sincerely your friend that I cannot but resent this. When an actor of genius creates a rôle as Frédérick created that one, prodigal in one evening of more mirth than you will find in Callot, more fancy than there is in Hoffmann, more irony than all Byron can boast, when he is worth Molière himself, and sums up, in a tremendous burst of laughter, all the humour and pathos of a century, he deserves something more than five or six cold lines. Dullards may be indifferent, but not such as you, who represent art, and are at once its champion and laureate. It is for us who are poets to uphold greatness, and to console genius, drenched with the outpourings of envy. I tell you in all sincerity that you have failed in this duty."

What, Callot, Hoffmann, Byron, Molière apropos of *Robert Macaire* played by Frédérick Lemaître! Why not Homer, Eschylus, Aristophanes? No good nature, however indulgent it may be, can rise to the height of such pretensions. I do not know whether Gautier sent any reply to this, I doubt it, for on such matters he had long ago got beyond being astonished, but I think it must have tickled his sense of humour.

Was this ungrateful labour at least properly

remunerated, and did it afford him an existence free from care? To this question, thanks to M. Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, we can reply precisely. From 1836 to 1851, that is to say during a term of fifteen years, the statement of the sums received from the paper *la Presse* by Théophile Gautier show a total of 100,336 francs and a few centimes (about £4,013), being an average of 6,500 francs (£260) a year,[1] which is certainly a very modest sum. We might imagine that to make up for it he was treated with much consideration, that it was understood how advantageous it was to have such a name signed to the Monday issue of the paper, and that they were grateful to the poet for forsaking poetry in order to write criticisms—but it was not so. An incident that was very painful to Gautier, will prove how much he, whom, with some little irony, he called his "master," Émile de Girardin, understood of the respect due to independence, and to the talent of the writers to whom the paper which he conducted owed its success. On the first of February, 1847, Gautier, after having given an account of pieces played at the Comédie Française, the Vaudeville, Cirque Olympique, and the Variétés, ended his daily article by saying:

[1] See Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, Introduction xxviii. and following.

"This year has begun badly, we have nothing but melancholy news on all sides. There is Chaudesaigues, a poet become critic like all of us to gain his daily bread, who the other day fell dead on the first page of his paper, and over there, under the beautiful Algerian sky, Benjamin Roubaud has died in the hospital of the Dey, a painter with whom we went through the Kabyle war, and who followed us throughout our journey, already shivering with the malady which has carried him off."

This phrase, perfectly innocent in itself, and which signified simply that if Chaudesaigues had only had the price which the editors would have paid for his verses, to live upon, he would have run a chance of dying of hunger, this phrase did not please the editor of *la Presse.* In the very Chamber of Deputies, of which he was a member, during the sitting, "in all haste, between two speeches, one from M. Roger, the other from M. Billault" he took up his pen, which was none the gentler for being indefatigable, and proceeded to rate Gautier. There was no mistaking the tone in which the publicist replied to the poet, it was without discretion or courtesy, like him who wrote it, and any one may read it in *la Presse* of February 2, 1847. After expressing astonishment that Théophile Gautier had not "been preserved from the

danger of the commonplace by the tendency to paradox which is natural to him," Émile de Girardin proclaims this truth: "He who looks at the goal without seeing the starting point, takes no count of the length of the course; it is the error of envious minds." If ever there was a man in the world who never knew envy it was Gautier—the good generous Théo. I mention it by the way, and Girardin could not have been ignorant of it.

The latter continues his lecture; he mentions the soldier, Jean de Dieu Soult, raised to the dignity of Marshal of France and Duke of Dalmatia, and he points out the workman Cunin-Gridaine, who became a minister, without reflecting that these two persons had but followed their bent, while Théophile Gautier complained of not being able to follow his. The proprietor of *la Presse* argues in his own way, and to show that a poet can live by poetry he enumerates the prose works which have helped to make the fortune of their writers. Does not Gautier's own work on the paper itself bring in the chief part of his revenue? Certainly it does, and poor Gautier never denied it; but if every Monday he had replaced the prose of his dramatic criticism by a piece of poetry, Émile de Girardin would without hesitation have got rid of a coadjutor so prompt at rhyming, thus proving

that the opinion expressed, apropos of Chaudesaigues, was less paradoxical than he had wished to think it. In any case this lesson—not to say this reprimand—publicly administered to a man of Théophile Gautier's reputation was a cruel wrong which he ought to have been spared.

He felt it deeply, and spoke to me of Girardin with extreme bitterness, qualifying his conduct by a word which I will not repeat. He said to me:

"My only reply should have been to send in my resignation as writer on *la Presse*, but I could not do it; I submitted to the outrage, which of itself proves that I was right in saying that for want of daily bread the poet is reduced to do work antipathetic to him; no, I could not throw my work on the paper in Girardin's face, for that was all I had to live upon, and others belonging to me had to live upon it too."

There was nothing exaggerated in this; he might have said, like Scarron, but with more truth: "I have always lived at the Inn of Impecuniosity." He was not alone in life, and family cares weighed upon him. He supported burdens that were both heavy and painful, which many others would have repudiated, but which he accepted without shrinking, and never shirked, let this be said to his everlasting honour. Duty

consists in submitting to the consequences of our own lives, and not in fleeing from them. On this head Gautier, whose immorality has often been jeered at—I mean that of too hasty speech and too daring comparisons—has given proof of superior morality, for he remained faithful to his responsibility, and never abandoned those who possessed any right to count upon him.

A long time after Girardin had committed this act of bad taste, towards 1862 or 1863, I met him at a watering-place, and one evening when we were sitting beside one another, and talking without listeners, I asked him why he had shown himself so aggressive and so hard on that occasion. He looked at me with that impertinent and bantering air which was familiar to him:

"Gautier," he said, "is a fool, who understands nothing about journalism; I put a fortune into his hands, his work on the paper ought to have brought him in 30,000 or 40,000 francs a year (£1,200 or £1,600), he never knew how to turn a penny by it. There is not a theatre manager who would not have given him an income for the purpose of having him as a speaking tube. He is at present, and since he left *la Presse*, on the *Moniteur universel*, that is to say the official organ of the Empire, he makes nothing out of it, and I repeat he is a fool who has never profited by his opportunities."

Knowing by experience that we readily judge of others by ourselves, I was not surprised at Girardin's opinion, but I changed the conversation. From what the man who was—I speak advisedly—the grand master of the journalism of his day, said to me, it is as well to remember this, that Théophile Gautier had in his hand a pen that was worth gold, and that he always remained poor.

CHAPTER III.

THE TRAVELLER.

TIED to his work on the paper, hardly able to leave Paris, where he was kept by the necessity of having to be present at the dramatic representations which he had to write about, Théophile Gautier, like a prisoner contemplating the country through the bars of his window, looked longingly across the frontier, and dreamt of flying away to unknown countries. He had never travelled, for I do not count an excursion in Belgium, made in company of Gérard de Nerval. In the works of his first youth he is not sparing in allusions to his sedentary life, from which we may conclude that it weighed upon him, and that he would seize with eagerness the white staff of the pilgrim poets. He felt, perhaps instinctively, that impressions gathered under foreign skies would be a fruitful complement to his literary education, already so rich ; he had, so to speak, exhausted the civilisations in the midst of which he moved, and his mind craved for others, above all those upon

which the past seemed to have set an indelible stamp. He wished to travel through those countries in which the traces of their history remained apparent in their manners. Like all those who are tormented with the migratory instinct, he imagined the countries he sighed to visit, as more beautiful, more wonderful than they are. He saw them through the dreams evoked by poetry. Like Alfred de Musset, he thought of Madrid, Princess of all Spain; pretty verses set to music by Hippolyte Monpou promised him fair ladies, "pale as a beautiful autumn evening," and *les Orientales*, inspired by the *Romancero*, spoke to him:—

> "Du fils de la renégate
> Qui commande une frégate
> Du roi maure Aliatar." [1]

Spain and Italy having furnished the framework of almost all the romantic dramas recently brought out, it was towards Italy and Spain that all eyes were turned. Literary fervour took the place of faith; history was rearranged, heaven knows how, but they believed in this history, however unnatural it might be, from the moment that it wore mediæval dress, and recited

[1] "Of the son of the renegade
Who commands a frigate
Of the Moorish king Aliatar."

some tirades on the boards of a theatre "of the school." They had no doubts either of Ruy Gomez's gallery of portraits, of Thisbe's narcotics, of the murders and incests, of the bombast, the anachronisms, or of the discords; they doubted nothing, not even Lucretia Borgia's little suppers. The most extraordinary ideas of the dramatists, justified by the tradition of the tolerance accorded to works destined for the stage, were accepted without remonstrance by the public, who regarded it as quite a simple matter that the wife of Alphonse d'Este should kill a husband every evening, and a few lovers every morning. I need not say that Théophile Gautier laughed in his sleeve at these frantic exaggerations, but he felt none the less an irresistible attraction towards the countries that served as a stage for all this machinery, made up of improbabilities, tinsel, and false sentiment, of which very soon not even the memory will remain—if it remains at all.

An accident at last permitted Gautier to make that journey to Spain, the desire of which possessed him. He had been associated for some years already with Eugène Piot who, in all matters concerning "objects of art, and curios," possessed, as sale catalogues have it, a precise knowledge, the trustworthiness of which was never at fault. He might be

ignorant of the fact that Pandolfo Malatesta assassinated Count Ghiazzolo at the castle of Roncofreddo, but he would know to a certainty the name of his armourer, the form of his sword, and the motto engraved on the blade. He had in several instances given proof of special knowledge which surprised people. A great lover of "curios," buying them to advantage, selling them even better, Eugène Piot told himself that in Spain, impoverished and ravaged by a recent civil war, there must be hidden away many objects of great taste—arms, tapestry, pictures—which it would be easy to acquire cheaply. Although he was sure of himself in everything concerning armour, furniture, rare pottery, ivories, and precious jewels, he—at that time at least—distrusted himself somewhat before a picture of the Spanish school, poorly represented in France then by second-rate masters, notwithstanding the galleries of Marshall Soult and the Marquis of las Marismas. He thought it might be useful to him to have a fellow-traveller trained in the technique of painting, capable of discerning the method of Zurbaran and that of Fra Diego de Leyva, and he proposed to Théophile Gautier to accompany him to the country of Murillo, Velasquez, and Ribeira. Gautier accepted, got some one to take his place on *la Presse*, and set

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out with the joyous eagerness of a schoolboy leaving school for the holidays.

I may say at once that the chief object Eugène Piot had in view was not attained. "The pictures that we might buy are horrible rubbish, the best of which would not fetch fifteen francs at a *bric-à-brac* shop." At Toledo, where they counted on "finding some old arms, daggers, poignards, Konigsmark swords, espadons, rapiers . . . there were no more swords to be found than leather at Cordova." In this respect their disappointment was complete. Spain luckily had some compensations in reserve for them which but ill-consoled Eugène Piot for the defeat of his hopes, but left in Gautier's mind never-to-be-forgotten memories. Notwithstanding his later travels, the journey that made the most profound impression upon him, that was dearest to him, and of which he always spoke with predilection, was the one begun in the month of May and ended in the month of October, 1840, when he was twenty-nine years of age, that is to say, with all the eagerness, all the vigour of youth, tempered by coming maturity. Twenty-seven years later, when, according to Montaigne's expression, he was already "old and dried up," he said:

"I cannot describe the enchantment into which

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that poetical and wild country threw me, the country dreamed of through Alfred de Musset's *Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie*, and Hugo's *Orientales;* I felt that I was on my native soil, and as though I had returned to my own country. After that my only idea was to save up a sum of money and set out again; the passion, or longing, for travel had developed in me."

This journey, the account of which is contained in one of Charpentier's volumes, 375 pages long, is perhaps Théophile Gautier's most interesting work, because in it he reveals himself as he was, without reserve, with the sincerity of an honest man, the simplicity of a poet, who does not take much account of received opinions, and who says what he thinks simply because he thinks it, just as a child lays bare its thoughts in relating its impressions. There is no paradox in it, its note is always true; if it shocks it is because it is misunderstood. He has a vision of Spain which he reproduces as best he can, that is to say very well. Those who look at the country from a different standpoint will be surprised, but can never accuse him of being inexact, at most they will have to acknowledge that their attention was not drawn to what excited his admiration. To make my meaning quite clear I will

relate an incident that happened to me. Not long ago I was chatting with a man who lives in one of our southern departments, a man of importance and rich, director of great and flourishing enterprises. I spoke to him about Arles and Avignon, of the gateway and cloister of Saint Trophime, of the arenas, of the castle of the Popes. He replied: "That region is a good deal changed since the chemical discovery of the red used in dyeing military cloth. Red madder is no longer cultivated between Avignon and Arles; you would not recognise the country." The readers belonging to this category of person, who are, however, the most honest people in the world, will not have been able to understand anything of the *Voyage en Espagne.* Théophile Gautier does not speak their language.

He is, so to speak, a pre-occupied traveller, and as he never contradicts himself once in the course of his narrative, we may take it that this "pre-occupation" is natural to him. He remains indifferent to everything which is not the journey properly speaking, free of all pre-occupation other than that of looking well to see well, and be able to reproduce what he sees. With him the "eye of the painter" had great power, the eye which knows what to fix upon, which takes in at once the whole effect and the details, the

line and colour, that stores up the contemplated picture and never forgets it. At times, by the very intensity of the sensation experienced, he arrives at a transposition of art, *ut pictura poesis* was true for him, more perhaps than for any one else. For the rest he proclaims it himself. He excuses himself for having given some historical details about the cathedral of Toledo, as though it were a fault, at the very least an involuntary impulse, and he adds: "We are not old offenders, and will return at once to our humble mission of tourist guide, and literary daguerreotypist."

Although his erudition was profound, he never allowed it to appear; we might think that he was afraid of being thought a pedant, and that the task he had set himself was simply to relate what he saw. If on his road he meets with some beautiful beetles, he does not trouble himself as to whether they have three, or four, or five articulations in the tarsus, but he will declare that their sheaths seem to be cut out of an emerald; if he plucks a flower it matters little to him whether it is monogynous or pologynous, he will say, like Alfred de Musset's Perdican: "I find that it smells good, that is enough." He carefully leaves out everything which might seem like technical expressions, and he is right, for the generality of readers do not understand them, that is why he is very

sparing of archeology, which is worthy of praise in an apostle of the Romanticist school, among whom gargoyles, machicolations, and watch towers, were quite the rage since the publication of *Notre Dame de Paris.* A word suffices him to indicate a style and an epoch; he passes on and does not lose time with descriptions of over-arches composed of a cluster of toruses separated by gorges (cavettos), as a novice with a dictionary of architecture at hand would not have failed to do.

Everything that might distract his attention and turn it from the panorama that is unrolled before his eyes annoys him. He has come to see the Spain of the age of chivalry, the Spain of Count Julian, of Don Gayféros, of the Cid Campeador, and of that poor Abou-Abdallah-ibn-Mulei-Hasan whom we call Boabadil, that was his aim, in truth he seeks none other. Although it was a good opportunity to speak of Prince Godoy, of King Joseph, of Ferdinand VII., he never even mentions their names. In going from Madrid to Grenada he scarcely ever makes an illusion to the capitulation of Baylen. As to politics, from which Spain was still trembling, or the civil war which laid waste the Peninsula, disturbed Europe and held diplomacy at bay, not a word—and yet Théophile Gautier was one of the first travellers who dared to go

through that country, where all along the roads the recently disbanded brigands lay in wait to plunder. When I say that he did not say a word about it, I am mistaken. He does mention it, describing a bull-fight at Malaga he says: "In times of political dissensions it often happens that the Christian *Toreros* do not go to the help of the Carlist *Toreros* and vice-versâ," —that is all.

To lay aside the archeological technology which "the devotees of the Middle Ages" endeavoured to speak, and to disdain the historico-political theories inspired by a journey into a foreign country, was at that period to perform an act of independence. Let us not deceive ourselves about this, Gautier broke away suddenly from the school and once more left the sanctuary. He repudiated the spirit of imitation, and fell back upon his own originality, without borrowing from others, undominated by the memory of the models which he admired. It was usual at that time to climb up the Romanticist mountain, and to pause on the summit and cast upon the nations a comprehensive look, the result of which would be a new discourse on universal history. Edgar Quinet, in his *Ahasuerus*—which is perhaps the most lyrical and the strongest of the Romanticist works—recalls the parabasis of Eschylus and

Aristophanes, and then through a choir of old men, at the end of the *Seconde Journée* he traces out for France the *rôle* which she must play, not only in Europe and the East, but in America as well; he calls upon the men of Lodi, of Castiglione, of Marengo, "and to-morrow and for ever make the nations move around you under the harmony of your sky." Victor Hugo ends the *Rhin* by a conclusion which is a book apart; nothing escapes him, neither the things of yesterday nor those of to-morrow; he reconstructs history a little after his own fashion by wide flights; he draws tremendous inferences from imperceptible causes, reprimands the peoples and points with his finger to the route which they must follow. Every poet they say is half a prophet, he tears away the veil which covers the secrets of the future, he prophecies, and, alas! the Fates do not listen to his words.

I believe that it was the very intensity of his impression that kept Gautier within the narrow but fruitful path which he never forsook. That impression was only so profound and absorbing for him, because he had felt it but very imperfectly before crossing the first spur of the Pyrenees. I think there is nothing exaggerated in this and I will explain myself. Confined to a manner of living, relatively speaking restricted, limited to the boulevards, the theatres, friendly

reunions, literary discussions, and dinners, merry or dull, Gautier never, so to speak, got away from Paris. The elms that at that time shaded the public promenades, the chestnut-trees in the Tuileries gardens, the sparse underwood of the Bois de Boulogne and the Bois Vincennes, the down-trodden grass of the Champs Élysées, represented a townified and ugly nature, displeasing to the eyes, aged, faded, without any renewing of spring, quite in keeping for the rest with the town which in the reign of Louis Philippe was one of the dirtiest, crookedest, and most unhealthy in this world of ours. Parisians of to-day who enjoy the admirable works that we owe to Baron Haussman, and Ferdinand Duval, can have no conception of it, but to be convinced of it they have only to read the succinct description of the Paris of those days, written by Théophile Gautier himself, in the obituary notice which he wrote of Paul de Kock,[1] the most popular novelist of that time.

Emprisoned within this conventional existence, in which the scenes of the Opera, lighted by the footlights, took the place of the peacefulness of shining landscapes, having never seen real forests, real mountains, real sea shores, real seas, Gautier, deluded by the duration of his

[1] *Portraits Contemporains*, by Théophile Gautier, 1 vol. Charpentier, Paris, 1886; page 127 and following.

reverie, had created for himself a sort of imaginary nature, in which his mind delighted all the more, the more improbable it was; at the pleasure of his will he made the characters of Watteau or of Boucher live and move there. I believe he went further back than the regency and the Rococo period (Louis XV.). Guided by Honoré d'Urfé he must gladly have followed the beautiful Diana de Chateaumorand who, disguised under the name of Astrea, delighted the country watered by the Lignon.

"It is a charming country that, and one that for my part I regret infinitely. The foliage of the trees there is of apple-green chenille, the grass of enamel, and the flowers of porcelain; banks of cloud-like cotton-wool float softly upon the blue taffeta of the sky."

What was extravagant and far-fetched did not displease him; artificiality attracted him, for he saw in it the result of an ingenious effort; he esteemed affectation and did not hide from himself that he did so.

"Affectation, that beautiful French flower, which flourishes so well in the flower-beds in compartments, of gardens of the old school, and which Molière has so wickedly trampled under foot in some immortal little wicked piece that I have forgotten." [1]

[1] *Les Grotesques*—Georges de Scudéry.

These landscapes of tender lilacs and mauves which he saw in his dream, which he loved for want of something better, and which, perhaps, he would not have imagined but for his aversion from the muddy lanes always before his eyes, these landscapes, pretty and unnatural to the point of being ridiculous, disappeared like a ghost at cockcrow, as soon as Gautier, having entered Spain, found himself face to face with nature as she is, and not as men have spoilt her. The aged Cybele showed herself to him in all her serene nudity, her primitive splendour, and her sacred beauty, and he was dazzled by her.

He was discovering the unknown a little, as La Fontaine discovered Baruch; but for him his discovery was no less precious, for—above all in a literary life—every time that we acquire an idea or get rid of a misconception, we make a new discovery. Even the change of existence was not without giving to his sensation an acuteness which he had not foreseen. Instead of the heavy, drowsy atmosphere of theatres, charged with doubtful smells, the work in one's own narrow room, the lounging about the boulevards where one is elbowed by every passer-by, the meals in the close cafés where one's appetite is taken away on entering with the smell of cooking; instead of all the disgusting and sickening things which are natural to all great towns—life

in the open air, the steep mountains, the deep gorges, the almost empty torrent-beds, where the wild grass grows green, the gallop of the mules with their tinkling bells, the dark rustic beauty passing by carrying a copper pot on her head, the wide horizon, the sunsets gilding the snowy summits of the serrated peaks, now and then a palm rising before us like an evocation from the dreamed-of East, and the memories which are whispered in legendary names, the mosques which catholicism has baptized after having torn them from Islam, and youth to enjoy the first delirium of all these delights.

It is true the beds at the inns are hard, the wine tastes of the goat-skin bottle in which it has been kept, the beggars are insolent, the pavements are tiring to the feet, the mosquitoes sound the charge, and attack with spirit, brigands are perhaps lying in ambush at the corner of the road, the jolting is intolerable on the mountainous roads in the carriages without springs; but what matters! We are happy, we are free, better than free, liberated, and gladly cry out, like Goethe: "Hurrah, hurrah! I have put my money into travels and migrations! Hurrah, hurrah!"

Those who are not real travellers, that is to say, who do not travel for travelling's sake, without any other interest but that of their in-

tellectual culture, without passion but the desire to see, will not understand me; but, after forty-six years, I cannot yet recall without a beating heart my first day's march in Asia Minor, when I went from Smyrna to Ephesus, pausing at every step to contemplate the caravans, the flight of the storks, the tortoises floating on the Mélès, and the woods of umbrella pines. These emotions, which our memory guards and embellishes, were felt by Théophile Gautier; at certain hours of his journey in Spain he experienced sensations and emotions which he has noted down. In spite of the calm which he forced himself to preserve on every occasion, he could scarcely restrain himself, he could not master his exaltation, and exclaims:

"I was absolutely intoxicated with that keen, pure air; I felt myself so light, so joyous and full of enthusiasm that I cried aloud and skipped about like a young kid; I felt a longing to fling myself headlong into those charming precipices, so blue, so vaporous, so velvety; I should have liked to let myself be tumbled in the cascades, to bathe my feet in all the streams, to pluck a leaf from every pine, to roll in the sparkling snow, to take a part in all that nature, and be dissolved like an atom in that immensity."

How well we know it—that extraordinary joy of life which takes hold of us sometimes in

our travels; there are sights before which we stand confounded, elevated as it were above our mortal nature, by the irresistible craving to be absorbed into the universal soul. I have sung at the top of my voice on the other side of Koseyr on seeing the waves of the Red Sea bathe the feet of my dromedary, and later I had tears in my eyes when in the evening a bend in the road of Mar-Sabah hid from me, beyond Lake Asphaltite, the mountains that I had been gazing at since the morning. In the month of January, 1870, I met Gautier, sad and doleful, and he said to me with a discouraged air, as though he felt his last dream escaping him, "Alas, we shall travel no more!"

The intensity of his feeling increased still more Gautier's power of sight: his short-sighted eyes searched into everything, neglecting no detail, and engraving on his memory for ever the images they had collected, and this gave him an extraordinary power of description when he wrote the account of his travels. There is with him no longer a question of that descriptive phraseology which describes nothing, and which Romanticism, too much occupied in dressing up from top to toe the legends of the Middle Ages, had not yet destroyed. The groves, the bowers, the landscapes, "made to please the eye," still flourished here and there. Jean Jacques Rous-

seau, who called himself the lover of nature, but who was not a painter of it, had not yet closed his school of landscape painting; his influence is still great in George Sand's first novels. Rousseau loved to "let his eyes hover upon the horizon of that beautiful lake whose borders and the mountains around it enchanted his view." He could not rid himself of a certain grumbling and "posing" philosophy, which ended by becoming insupportable, for it is put on, and makes part of the equipment of that sensibility which he brought into fashion. "I had made it a habit to go in the evenings to sit beside the lake, especially when it was agitated. I felt a singular pleasure in watching the waves break at my feet, it seemed to represent to me the tumult of the world and the peace of my dwelling." There is nothing of that kind of thing with Théophile Gautier; he is much too sincere not to reject such a medley of rhetoric, in which neither the author nor his readers believe. All declamation is unknown to him, and we do not find a trace of it in his books; he does not weep over ruins, a tree shattered by the storm does not remind him of the instability of human life, and he can watch a river flowing without comparing it to the flight of time. We understand that what was commonplace was odious to him, and that platitudes exasperated

him; to some readers he will doubtless seem paradoxical, but never pedantic.

"I feel sure that those who have not travelled as much as I have, and who do not know all the rare beauties of nature from having seen them nearly all as I have done, will not be sorry if I tell them a few particulars about them. The description of the smallest details is my special forte; it is upon that that I most frequently employ my small skill."

It was Saint Amant, the poet of *Rome ridicule* and *Moïse sauvé*, Saint Amant, the gentleman glass manufacturer and boon companion, who wrote that phrase, but it applies exactly to Gautier. Would one not say that it was written by him for himself? His "small skill" was by no means of slight value, for it endowed French literature with a method of description unknown, or at least very little practised until then. Gautier brings to the art of description a really extraordinary precision. His expression never wanders, is neither vague, confused, nor peculiar, and does not strive to be learned; it is just right, absolutely simple, which is the height of talent. The word he employs is so exactly where it ought to be, is chosen with so much sagacity, that no other could replace it. This result seems to be obtained without effort,

naturally, so to speak, which is the achievement of great writers.

This clearness of description, which gives to the reader the impression received by the traveller, was for the first time brought to perfection by Théophile Gautier. This note is personal to him, for no one before him had given it so fully, I will say so persuasively; they imitated him, but could not equal him, in this respect he is unrivalled. That alone, without counting his other qualities, makes him a master, for by the unique flight of his individual talent he has replaced a barren style by a fruitful one, which was his own creation. Whatever may be the talent of those who came after him, and are still to come, he will remain the pioneer. If I were not afraid of appearing pretentious, I would say, that in disdaining approximates and doubtful equivalents, in seizing upon the object itself, and putting it in relief, in placing it with exactness according to the position proper to it under the reader's eyes, he invented descriptive honesty. Whatever may be the admiration with which he is filled, and which he allows to overflow with a sort of secret joy, he never overshoots the mark, for with him—and I insist on this point—the spirit of justice is strongly developed, the result being that justice always dominates him, forbids him those flights to

which artists are only too much inclined, and preserves him from all exaggeration. I have no hesitation either in saying that Théophile Gautier's accounts of his travels seem to me superior to those of Victor Hugo. We might say that the latter sees everything through a magnifying glass—his vision is aggrandized; in his eyes everything becomes enormous, and the landscapes and monuments are so distorted that they are hardly recognisable. To go up or down the Rhine after reading Victor Hugo's book is to expose oneself to certain disappointment, the extent of the pictures in it, the magnificence of the style have altered the landscape and diminished the river, the ruins, and cathedrals, in the very endeavour to make them larger. Such is not the case with Théophile Gautier, the agreement between the description and the object described is absolute, which in a book of travels should be the dominant quality. And I can quite understand how in the *Rayons et les Ombres* Hugo exclaimed:—

". . . Oh! si Gautier me prêtait son crayon!" [1]

His preconceived ideas, born of his romantic dreams about Spain, did not weaken his judgment, and were very often dispersed by the reality; his enthusiasm was serious, but his

[1] ". . . Ah! if Gautier would only lend me his pencil!"

good faith was more serious still, and nothing disturbed it. Just as he explains without scruple his admiration, so without false shame he notes his disappointments, and they were numerous. Amongst the women he fails to discover the Spanish type; the Manola of Madrid "no longer wears her costume so bold and so picturesque, and a humble cotton petticoat has replaced the gay-coloured skirts embroidered with enormous flower patterns." Jealousy no longer exists in love, whatever may have been sung in romances or said on the stage. "The Musée d'artillerie in Paris is incomparably richer and more complete than the *Armeria* of Madrid." It is not until they reach Granada that the "general aspect entirely surpasses any ideas one may have formed." In the course of his narrative he makes everything clear, and by the truth of his statements destroys more than one legend which had been accepted on the faith of poets, dramatists, and untrustworthy travellers.

Never, perhaps, as in this *Voyage en Espagne* did he let it be seen how much the civilisation into which he had chanced to be born weighed upon him, this civilisation in which everything is foreseen, where every man is labelled, and individual initiative is often thwarted by the exegencies of the whole, where we are born, live,

and die according to rule, where even a certain manner of dressing is compulsory, where love is only legitimate with the help of the notary, where pushing crowds force sensitive minds to retire within themselves, and where newspaper editors bully poets, and threaten to put them on dry bread—he had suffered from all of these things. He asks himself whether, instead of being civilised as we boast ourselves, we are not worn-out barbarians. To politicians, whose frenzy of ambition has dragged them into civil wars, he says: "In the future it will not be known that you have been a great people except by a few marvellous remains discovered in excavations." He regrets the departure of the Moors. "Spain is not made for European manners. The spirit of the East is seen in all its forms, and it is perhaps a pity that it did not remain Moorish or Mahomedan." At Cordova, in the mosque which is beautiful in spite of the mutilations it has undergone, he is more positive. "I have always greatly regretted for my part, that the Moors did not remain masters of Spain, which certainly was only a loser by their expulsion."

Then follow the lamentations of an artist who loves colour, beautiful trappings, knightly prowess, and who sometimes surveys history too much through the distorting prism of

poetry. If Spain had remained under Arab dominion she would never have known the glories of Charles V. As Mahomet was the last of the prophets, and the Koran is the last revelation that God deigned to make to mankind, the people who turn towards Mecca when praying to Allah are condemned to immobility, that is to say, to decadence, to defeat, and submission. If Charles Martel, Jean Hunyade, and Sobieski had not conquered the Musulmans on the fields of Poitiers, Cassovia, Choczim, and Vienna, Europe would perhaps to-day be governed by the law of the Koran, or, more properly speaking, she would be lying dormant, fatalistic, enfeebled, without memory of the past, without care for the morrow, and would think her whole duty fulfilled, when she had told her beads enumerating the ninety-nine attributes of God. It is well to admire Arab architecture, but it must be admitted that nations do not live only by pilasters, sculptured stalactites, and fretted pendatives.

Théophile Gautier, who had not then been to Algeria or Cairo, imagined Arab life to be quite different from what it is, above all from what it was. Failing the reality, he tried to imagine it for himself, and he obtained permission to inhabit the Alhambra, to sleep there, and wander about as though he were in his own

palace. His imagination without doubt did not fail to people it in his own way, and to give *fêtes* there in which Oriental dancers danced the "Bee" to the sound of the derbouka and the double flute, for he wrote: "We remained there four days and four nights, which were the most delightful hours of my life." I am persuaded that the love of art alone made those moments as delightful as he says, however I recall this verse from *Emaux et Camées* :—

"Au sou des guitars d'Espagne
Ma voix longtemps la celebra ;
Elle vint, un jour, sans campagne,
Et ma chambre fut l'Alhambra." [1]

Is he only drawn by a kind of retrospective love towards the epoch of the Moorish dominion, which he imagined more epic, more grandiose than it was? It seems to me that if he returns to the past, it is in a spirit of opposition, with a feeling of anger against the habits of civilisation, Parisian habits, which he escaped from with eagerness, and which pursued him on all sides in the towns, on the roads, even into the villages buried in the depths of their valleys.

[1] "To the sound of Spanish guitars
My voice long time extolled her ;
She came one day alone,
And my home was the Alhambra."

To seek local colour, brilliant costumes, sombreros, and only to find frock coats, trousers, opera hats, long dresses, and leg-of-mutton sleeves is hard, it makes him suffer, and he cannot be silent about it. In 1840 "Paris fashions" had already begun to be general, and to take the place of the costume of the country, the originality of which was a delight to the eyes of the artist. What is it then that in our day the great outfitting establishments "for men and women," with the help of railways, have done with their uniformity of colour, of cut, and stuff, the principal object of their exportation? The whole of Europe dresses in the same manner, is that why their dress is so ugly? "It is a sad sight," says Théophile Gautier, "for the poet, the artist, and the philosopher to see forms and colours disappearing from the world, lines distorted, colours confused, and the most hopeless uniformity invading the universe, under I know not what pretence of progress." And further on: "It will become impossible to distinguish a Russian from a Spaniard, an Englishman from a Chinese, a Frenchman from an American. We shall not even be able to distinguish ourselves from one another for all the world will be alike. Then the universe will be filled with great weariness, and suicide will decimate the population of the

globe, for the moving spirit of life will be extinguished—curiosity." We have not arrived at suicide yet, only at pessimism, which is the yawning of the mind; but with all due deference to Gautier's shade, I do not think that costume has anything to do with it.

If as being more convenient in everyday life, for economy perhaps, certainly from a spirit of imitation, Spain has little by little severed herself from the manners of her ancestors, she has returned to those manners again entirely, and resuscitated them in a barbarous, glittering, Oriental way in her bull-fights, which seem to be a necessity of the people and a glory of the nation. In assisting at them Gautier could hardly contain himself for joy; he is "possessed" as we should say to-day; neither the long wait nor the torrid heat could lessen his curiosity, he associated himself with the emotions of the crowd, and like it he was intoxicated with the carnage. This man, whose gentleness was proverbial, this poet, whose intelligent courtesy respected every form of life even in the flowers which he disliked to pluck from their stems, this philosopher, whom violence inspired with horror, is filled with admiration for the sanguinary spectacle, he exults in it, claps his hands, and he also is breathless, and according to the fortunes of the struggle cries

out, *Bravo Toro!* or *Bravo Torero!* Strange contradiction, only to be explained by the extreme development of his artistic sense, by the attraction of a drama in which nothing is fictitious, by the enthusiasm which courage inspires, even when it is useless and cruel.

Whenever during his journey he could be present at a bull-fight, Théophile Gautier never missed it, and he is always ready to laugh at the timid sentimental moralists—of whom I am one —who blame the taste for this *barbarous entertainment;* he has taken care to underline these two last words in order to prove in what contempt he held the "bourgeois" who did not shrink from using such pitiful commonplaces to express the stupidity of their thoughts. He travels night and day, and doubles the stages of his journey so as to arrive at an opportune time at Malaga, where bull-fights are being arranged which promise to be full of interest. The interest was not lacking, for in the space of three days twenty-four bulls were brought low, and ninety-six horses disembowelled. The most celebrated *spada* (swordsman) of that time in Spain, Montès de Chiclana, was applauded like an emperor on the day of his triumph, and also hissed like a run-away dog. It would seem that for such persons no less than for Mirabeau, the Tarpeian rock is not far from the Capitol.

Montès, finding himself battling against a dangerous animal, killed it in some irregular manner.

"When they understood the blow," says Gautier, "a storm of abuse and hisses burst forth in an extraordinary din and uproar: 'Butcher, assassin, brigand, thief, galley-slave, hangman!' were the gentlest terms used. 'To the galleys with Montès, burn him, set the dogs upon him!' I never saw such fury, and I own with shame that I shared in it. Vociferations did not long suffice, they began to pelt the poor devil with fans, hats, sticks, jars full of water, and fragments of torn up benches."

After the fight Montès left, "swearing by all his gods that he would never set foot in Malaga again." Just punishment, noble pride! Would one not say Coriolanus leaving Rome, or Scipio composing his epitaph: *Nec ossa quidem habebis!*

That the vanity of these slayers of beasts should be excessive, and consequently slightly comical is not surprising. Their glory, that is to say, the uproar that arises about them, is all the more resounding that it lasts so short a time. The enthusiasm of the multitude is like a thunderstorm, which makes much noise, and when it calms down often leaves only ruins behind it. Montès was the king of the day, and the idol of Spain, it was felt to be an honour to wear his colours, and the women

whom destiny reserved for thrones, made him take his seat beside them in their carriages after the fight. From Santandar to Tarifa, from Salamanca to Tortosa there was not a heart that did not beat for him; he enjoyed every sort of delight, and might imagine himself the national hero, and compare himself to Bernard de Carpio. Gautier, rather *blasé* in the matter of successes in the theatre or the arena, of which he had so often been a spectator, is profoundly touched by the ovations made to the Torero, and he says with his usual good faith: "For such homage I can understand that one would risk his life every minute, and that it would not be paying too high a price." So be it, I will not cavil at it, though I have no such longing for my part; but I think that Gautier went too far, and exceeded his own thought, when in speaking of the moment in which the Torero is face to face with the bull, he writes: "It is difficult to express in words the curiosity full of agony, the frenzied attention, which this situation excites, and which is worth all Shakespeare's dramas." Is that all? No, the impression must have been of singular violence to allow him, the poet, the man of delicate feeling, the lover of beautiful pictures, and charming verse, to make the following avowal when coming out of the Malaga Theatre:

"I reflected upon the striking contrast between the crowd of the circus, and the solitude of the theatre, of the eagerness of the multitude for the brutal deed, and its indifference to the speculations of the mind. A poet myself, I began to envy the gladiator, and to regret having quitted a life of action for one of dreaming. The evening before a piece of Lopes de Vega's had been played, which did not draw at all; thus antique genius, and modern talent, are not worth a thrust of the sword of Montès!"

Horace never regretted not being an audabate,[1] a bestiarius,[2] or mirmillon,[3] and has written *Odi profanum vulgus et arceo.* Is it then nothing to outlive oneself, and Gautier talking in that manner, does he not see that he is forsaking the substance for the shadow? The Torrero's sword-thrust, the "soul" of the singer, the chest-note of the tenor, the grimace of the clown, the gesture of the tragedian, the undulating movements of the dancer, the intonations of a beautiful voice, the walk of a Phèdre, the fury of a Camilles, the smile of a Célimènes, rouse the admiration of the public, who are eager to carry in triumph those to whom they owe a few minutes of emotion. Gladiators and virtuosi, clowns and reciters, have had their day,

[1] Gladiator who fought blindfold.

[2] Gladiator who had to fight with wild beasts.

[3] Gladiator who fought with the retiarius.

(*Trans.*)

that day passed all is at an end for them. Death puts the sword in its scabbard, extinguishes the voice, stops the gesture, interrupts the dance, and nothing remains, not even a positive remembrance, for words are powerless to make us understand the motive for these ovations, and ephemeral celebrities. A quatrain, a page of prose, a picture, a statuette, suffice to immortalise a man. Real glory is that which consists in holding one's proofs in hand. It is worth more to have written a drinking song, than to have killed all the bulls in Spain.

Ah! Gautier, my old friend, if Montès is not yet completely forgotten, it is perhaps because you spoke of him. Alfred de Vigny was certainly inspired, and nobly claimed his due, when, after having considered his ancestors, gone over their papers, and visited their tombs, he exclaimed:

"C'est en vain que d'eux tous le sang m'a fait descendre;
Si j'écris leur histoire, ils descendront de moi."[1]

Let us give to Montès what belongs to Montès—courage, and a cheer—and to the poet his due—inspiration, grandeur of thought, and lasting renown.

[1] "In vain my blood descends from them;
If I write their history, they will descend from me."

During the six months that Théophile Gautier passed in Spain he was happy, or at least contented, although our modern civilisation was in some respects more advanced there than was to his liking. In this respect he seems to be a little unjust, for it took him no less than four and a half days to accomplish the thirty leagues that separate Malaga from Cordova, so that in this particular at least Spanish civilisation, or whatever took its place at that time, took pains to play the coquette with him. He always loved that country after he had travelled through it, firstly because it was the first foreign country he visited, secondly because he there experienced new emotions which charmed him, and lastly because he was young, vigorous, full of eager curiosity, without any heavy burdens in life, with no regrets for the past, without anxiety for the future, and because his talent seemed ripe and full of hope. And so he loved Spain, and often between two feuilletons he would escape, cross the Pyrenees, breathe the air of the Sierras, go and see a bull-fight, and revived by this runaway visit to the friendly country of his dream, take up with less weariness his evening task at the theatre, his weekly work on the paper.

When he disembarked at Port Vendres in the month of October, 1840, he felt that he was

leaving behind him something which he would never find again.

"Shall I confess to you? In putting foot on my native soil I felt the tears, not of joy but of regret, rise to my eyes. The red towers and silver summits of the Sierra Nevada, the oleanders of the Generalife Palace at Grenada, the ardent gaze of velvet eyes, the lips of carnation, the little feet and hands, all that came back to me so vividly, that this France of ours seemed to me a land of exile. My dream was ended."

This is the regret of the poet, who wished to see again the scenes and vestiges of bygone worlds which he had admired. In noting this impression of sadness, well-known to travellers, Gautier forgets how, fifteen days before, in an inn at Carmona, he had been moved at the sight of coloured lithographs representing some scenes of the July Revolution. "It was a little bit of France framed and hung on the wall." Here again the note is true; in a strange country, wherever it may be, everything that recalls one's native land stirs the heart, and brings tears to the eyes.

Gautier did not deceive himself; the love of travel had taken possession of him, a tyrannical longing which is a sort of reversed home-sick-

ness, and which becomes acute suffering when not satisfied. Therefore as soon as he "had saved a small sum" he departed. In 1845 he travelled through Algeria, and this journey was to result in a book written and "illustrated" by himself. He was at work upon it when the February Revolution, making of his editor a bankrupt and politician, interrupted the work which was never taken up again, and only a few fragments of which ever appeared. If, as Gautier wrote, his entrance on *la Presse* in 1836 put an end to the independence of his life, we might say that the 1848 Revolution destroyed the peace of his existence. It is from that date, in fact, that his difficulties increased about him, and pressed upon him so heavily, that more than once he was on the point of succumbing to them. By dint of patience, and by assiduous labour, he conquered his ill-luck; he extricated himself from the morass in which he had so long struggled, and got clear of it, when the Revolution of September 4, 1870, plunged him into it anew. Painful irony of fate, to strike at a man through politics, who had always been so indifferent on the subject, that he probably did not know the names of the Ministers of his time. A few months before his end, when he was worn out under the weight of his own ruin, he exclaimed: "I am a victim of Revolutions."

They smiled at him, but they were wrong: he only spoke the truth.

In 1850, accompanied by Louis de Cormenin, whom he loved dearly, he started for Italy, and travelled through it from the Duomo d'Ossola to Naples. He prolonged his stay by about two months at Venice, which had just again been taken possession of by the Austrian eagle. It was then certainly the sad and touching city of which Edgar Quinet spoke: "Venice dead, upon her cushion of silk, and rowed by her gondolier through the tempest to the Valley of Jehoshaphat." Thank heaven, she has revived before the last judgment! Gautier was carried away by the ancient city of the Doges, the Council of Ten, the gondolas, and the Piazza of St. Mark. The book which he dedicated to it —*Italia*—is known to every one. The large amount of talent which it is agreed is contained in every page of the *Voyage d'Espagne*, is confirmed and concentrated in this volume. Reality —I do not say realism—has never been carried so far. Later Gautier did as well; he never did better, neither in describing the Golden Horn, nor when from the top of the Kremlin he takes a comprehensive view of Moscow. A phrase, sometimes even a word, is sufficient to call up a spell the power of which is astonishing. What traveller, having been to Venice, does not feel

as though he had penetrated into St. Mark's on reading the following: "The first impression is that of a cavern of gold, encrusted with precious stones, magnificent and sombre, at once brilliant and mysterious"? The whole of Venice thus reviewed, palpitates and revives, and even should she disappear in an inundation caused by the Adriatic breaking through the barriers of the Murazzi, we shall find her again under Gautier's pen. What he did for Venice, he wished to do for Florence, Rome, Naples, and Pompeii, from which he would a second time have cleared away the cinders of Vesuvius. This was only a project which he never realised, not for want of the will, but for want of time.

It is difficult to understand that not one of the Governments under which Théophile Gautier lived, had the intelligence to turn to account the exceptional gifts of this poet-traveller, whose truth was so unimpeachable. Why did they not take him away from the paper, and turn him loose upon the world of the Ancients—the East—which attracted him, and which he could only skim across, for every one of his halting-places was counted by the pages of copy which he sent to his paper; he appraised the kilometers by the number of lines which they cost him. What books he would have brought back from Egypt, Palestine, Syria,

Mesopotamia, Hindustan, China, and Japan! No one thought about it, I dare say, "in the lofty regions of power"; no one troubled to increase our literary riches, and as Gautier was neither a learned prig, nor wearisome, they despised him. The very first virtue of a statesman should be discernment. Those who ought to have occupied themselves about Gautier can have had very little, for not one of them was able to recognise his eminent qualities. It is to the detriment of French literature that they left him to sleep on the bed of Procrustes of the dramatic reports, where he was always cramped, and could never stretch himself.

I know well that Gautier possessed wit, foresight, a high degree of originality, and a manner of expressing himself that was quite irreproachable; it is just that and no more that is required amongst "the most witty people on earth" in order that a man may never be taken seriously. "Ah! you are not an imbecile; well, then you are fit for nothing!" I must add, so as to omit nothing, that the red doublet, and long hair, worn at the first performance of *Hernani* overshadowed his whole existence, just as the *Ballade à la Lune* and *le Point sur un i* weighed on Alfred de Musset's.

In 1852 Gautier went to Constantinople, in 1858 to Russia; both these journeys, like the

others, were made with sheaves of copy from day to day, and there were at times terrible anxieties, when the cashier of the paper or the post was behindhand. At the inauguration of the Suez Canal he embarked for Egypt, this time at the expense of the *Journal officiel.* Ill luck pursued the poor poet, who was rejoiced at the thought of going to salute *Abou-l'houl* (the father of terror), that is to say, the Sphinx of Gyzeh, climbing the Pyramids, and ascending the Nile as far as Ibsambul. On board the *Mœris*, the steamer which was taking him to Alexandria, he fell down and broke his left arm. He resigned himself with outward philosophy which did not give way, but the devil lost nothing thereby. Instead of making a new volume out of this journey, he was obliged to content himself with writing a few summary articles which were added to others in *l'Orient.*[1]

One of his last journeys exercised an extraordinary influence over him which he had not foreseen. After having visited Constantinople, which took him somewhat out of his way, and pleased him but little, doubtless on account of the anxiety of mind which he suffered there, he stopped four days at Athens, and then resumed his journey towards Venice—his dear Venice, so much admired, so beloved, so regretted—and

[1] *L'Orient*, 2 vols. Charpentier, vol. ii. from p. 91 to 228.

there he rested. The second day after his arrival he wrote a letter to Louis de Cormenin, which I have before my eyes now, and from which I copy the following passage, that testifies to the loyalty of an artist incapable of deceiving others while trying to deceive himself :

"I was enraptured with Athens. Beside the Parthenon everything appears barbarous and coarse ; one feels that one is Muscogulge, Uscoque, and Mohican before those pure marbles, so radiant and serene. Modern painting seems nothing but the tattooing of cannibals, and statuary a mere kneading of grotesques. Returning from Athens, Venice seemed to me trivial and fantastically decadent. Such is my crude impression."

He toned down the form of this impression later, though he kept to it where he says in his autobiography : "I liked cathedrals very much on the faith of *Notre Dame de Paris*, but the sight of the Parthenon cured me of the Gothic malady never very strong in me."

In the matter of admiration it is not bad to have several maladies ; I avow for my part that the Parthenon, the sight of which produced an inexpressible emotion within me, did not in the least prevent me from admiring the temples of Karnac, and that even after having stayed some time at Athens I could never enter Venice with-

out emotion. In the expansion of human genius, every superior manifestation finds its place, and has a right to be revered. The pantheon of art contains more than one divinity; it seems to me wise to honour them, while keeping one's own particular devotion, and offering oblations to such of them as identify themselves the most with our aspirations. It is not expedient to say to artists: "You shall adore one God only." The paradise of art is made like Homer's Olympus; the gods there jostle one another, love one another, and quarrel, and are none the less gods.

In juxtaposition to Théophile Gautier's opinion, I will place that of M. Daveluy, an old pupil of the normal school, a valued professor, a dignitary of the University. He was director of the French school at Athens, when I arrived there towards the end of the year 1850. I went to call upon him, and while conversing with him I could see through the open window the Acropolis, bathed in light, which supported the Parthenon, the temple of the Winged Victory, and the Pandrosium, like a triple diadem of beauty, grace, and elegance. I said to him: "How happy you are to be able to contemplate that wonder work every hour of the day!" I had made a mistake. Daveluy flung up his arms angrily and cried out: "Shut the blinds, draw

the curtains, the sight is painful to me; the Parthenon is wearisome, I do not wish any one to talk to me about it, this Greece is to me a land of exile and trial, it is easy to see that you are not forced to live here!" Then, growing tender and with tears in his eyes, he continued, "Ah! the Luxembourg garden, the courtyard of the Sorbonne, my old Sorbonne in the rue Saint Jacques!" He repeated over and over again in a moved voice, "the rue Saint Jacques, the rue Saint Jacques!" Then he let his head fall between his hands and remained silent. The poor man regretted his own country, and did not care much for Ictinus, Calicrates and Phidias. He was still, much against his will, at Athens when Théophile Gautier passed through it; if they met their conversation should have been interesting.

Gautier's opinion, as a member of the *Cénacle*, a leader of great battles fought against the classic, may seem strange, but it is not so however, and did not surprise any one of those who knew him intimately. Like the youth of his time, like the dreamers and artists, feeling that there was "something in it," he had been enticed and led away by the Romanticist movement, which was mistaken for a revolt, and which was—happily—a revolution out of which grew a new order of things literary. He had his exaggerations, his

"flare-up," his excessive enthusiasms, he loved daggers, morions, and shoes turned up at the toes, that is all right. To be of some value when one is grown up, perhaps one ought to have been an insurgent in one's years of adolescence. In spite of the follies of the new school, with which he was associated if he was not the promoter of it, Théophile Gautier had a remarkably well-balanced mind; however he might preach excitement, he loved upright dealing, and his admirations were always for the most sober-minded of the masters. The delicacy of a stroke, the subtlety of an idea, grace of form, fascinated him, and he could not resist them, even though he wished to do so. Joubert's *Pensées*, which he never ceased to praise, he kept for a long time always beside his bed. Neither Spain nor Italy had completely satisfied him. When at Athens he saw the "temple of such radiant perfection," he was intoxicated. "There, in truth, placed upon the Acropolis as upon a golden tripod, in the midst of a sculptural choir of the mountains of Attica, shines forth for ever true beauty, absolute, perfect." The monuments and landscapes of Hellas seemed to him like something already seen, as though after a long exile he were returning to his longed-for native land. In presence of the most complete efflorescence of

this Greek Art which Shelley called "the Art of the gods," he felt himself transfigured, and at that moment which counted in his life he could say:

"Je vois, je sais, je crois, je suis désabusé." [1]

In reality Théophile Gautier, whom they liked to compare to a Turk or a Hindoo, because they were mistaken in his apparent indolence, which hid a rare acuteness of thought, was neither one nor the other, he was much more Greek—a Greek of the grand period, of that epoch the brilliance of which has not yet died out, for it still sheds light upon humanity. After his journey to Greece, in conversation with his intimates, Gautier, when he was in a mood to believe in the transmigration of souls, would declare that he had lived at Athens in the time of Pericles, and would relate his conversations with Eschylus, and Aristophanes, who he said was sad like all comedians; he would demonstrate that Aspasia little deserved her reputation, and would recollect that he had found the banquet immortalised by Plato wearisome. He would say all this with his hardly-perceptible smile, that sometimes revealed so many mental reservations. Was he paradoxical? I do not know, for his

[1] "I see, I know, I believe, I am undeceived."

imagination was sufficiently powerful to deceive himself.

The sight of the Parthenon revealed to him what he had sought in vain in many countries, and under many manifestations of art—abstract beauty. He needed no conversion, he recognised his god and adored him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STORY-TELLER.

IT was neither against art, nor against poetry, nor against the Greek theatre, that Romanticism made a stand; it was against clumsy imitations of masterpieces, against an enfeebled literature, a decadent architecture, that under pretext of respect for tradition, repeated itself ceaselessly, reproducing forms of which it had lost the secret, and seeming to fall back into infancy—it was not marble that they spurned, but pasteboard statuary. It was high time for a reaction, for they had arrived at the last stage of senility. In opposition to frontals, and cupolas, they fell into an excess of the gothic, proclaimed the superiority of the arcade over the architrave, nearly died of joy before the cathedrals, and attempted a resurrection of the Middle Ages, that, in many cases was nothing but a masquerade. Seriously minded people were carried away, Michelet himself was caught by it, and did not hesitate later to cry *mea culpa*, when he saw that his good faith had been duped

by itself. What has been forgotten to-day is that the clergy, without openly espousing the quarrel that raged between the two inimical camps, leaned towards Romanticism and supported it without much concealment. There is nothing to surprise us in this.

Romanticism, logical in its return towards the Middle Ages, frankly acknowledged the God of the crusades and St. Louis, to the detriment of pagan divinities, whom poetry had overdone *ad nauseam.* It was an impulse not without its value, but there was another, more grave in its consequences, and that was only acknowledged in a low voice between "wise and discreet persons." The taste for Gothic art, so long proscribed as barbarous, sprang up again with singular vigour. The ogival churches with pointed windows, florid and magnificent, fell into ruins, and the public disdained to trouble itself about them. There was an outcry against such vandalism, agitations, and protestations, and the clergy gave their support to these manifestations, which might lead to the restoration of religious edifices that had suffered by time, and reinstate such of them as since the Revolution had ceased to be consecrated to worship. It was thus, by this crooked path, that the Romanticist movement, impelled by a motive power strange to art, sprang from the studios

where it was hatched, and penetrated into society, which at that time still exercised a certain influence over opinion. The Middle Ages became the fashion, I will not mention the authors who were celebrated then, and I will not tell after them—*corne et tonnerre!*—of the escapades in haketons [1] and hennins [2] which were the delight of the fair ladies of the day. Why should we disturb the dead?

Théophile Gautier was given the watchword and did not conform to it. Victor Hugo had just obtained one of the most brilliant successes ever known, with his publication of *Notre Dame de Paris*. Gautier thought well of it, but he did not choose to quarrel over the leavings of the master with the neophytes who picked them up with more ardour than originality. He left the Middle Ages to others, and would have nothing to do with them: if in passing he refers to them in *les Jeune-France*, it is with a want of respect. He wished certainly to adopt their principles, encourage their efforts, to stand by the combatants and inspirit them, but on condition of fighting a partisan fight with his own arms under his own banner. Like Alfred de Musset he understood how to maintain his independence, and he did maintain it until his last hour, keeping his individuality intact, and not

[1] A jacket or tunic without sleeves. [2] Steeple-headdresses.

allowing himself to be influenced, in spite of the devotion which he professed for Victor Hugo.

It has been said that there was a want of energy about Gautier, and that he allowed himself to be easily influenced by others, but that was a mistake. They mistook his kindliness for weakness, and if in his daily articles he did not always feel obliged to resist the claims of comradeship, it was wrong to conclude from that that his opinions were vacillating and his convictions uncertain. He was a traveller, story-teller, poet,—necessity, I repeat, made of him a critic, a very honourable profession assuredly, but which did not suit his nature, he has reiterated this often enough for us not to doubt it; for that very reason he exercised his profession with a good nature which has been described as commonplace. They would have done better to say that the insignificance of most of the works that he had to speak about—how many are mentioned now?—was such that it was indifferent to him whether he praised or blamed them. He lent to the side of praise led by his easy temper, and also by that spirit of justice which I have pointed out in him. He took into account the attempt, and feared the prejudice which severe though just remarks might have upon it. He would tone down what he had to say, and often had nothing but indulgence when

he would have been justified in censuring. Those even who profited by his benevolence turned him into ridicule, and accused him of want of character. They were ungrateful, which was natural to them, but they passed a decree which was flagrantly unjust. In what concerns his artistic convictions Gautier was an independent, he never made any concessions to the literary fashions of his day; he accepted Romanticist theories without reserve, and pressed them into the service of his originality which they developed, but he only made use of such of them as it suited him to take. He remained what he wished to be, the knight-errant of the new literature, without any other tie but admiration for the general-in-chief, and sympathy with the soldiers. He marched alone, accepting no yoke, not even that of Victor Hugo.

To be convinced of this, to understand how personal is his note, one has only to re-read his novels. Above the tumult, in the midst of those clamorously flourishing trumpets, which exhausted themselves by their own efforts, they seem like the tones of a violoncello, the vibration of which is prolonged, harmonious and charming, with all the vigour and purity of the initial note, although more than fifty years have passed since the master took up his bow for the first time. Hugo remains in possession of an undisputed,

undisputable glory, lighting up a whole epoch with its radiance; but without committing the sin of irony, we may point out that the two poets of his school, who remained since his advent the most fresh and living, are just those who separated themselves most from him, Théophile Gautier, and Alfred de Musset.

The first thing that Gautier wrote when he was hardly twenty-two, at the hour of the most violent outburst of Romanticism, strangely resembles a satire. He does not refrain from laughing at eccentricities which he was the first not to shirk himself, in a word, he criticises the historical methods of the new school. Hear what he says of Wildmanstadius, the man of the Middle Ages, "He would have related to you, point by point, the chronicle of the petty Breton king, prior to Gralon and Conan, and you would have surprised him very much by speaking of Napoleon," which proves that admiration and impertinence may go well together. I know that the poem *Albertus*, composed upon the very altar of the new gods, should redeem these peccadilloes, but it was interesting to prove that from the beginning Gautier reserves his prose, he is an ally not a liege man.

The different articles which collected together form the volume *Jeune-France*, are doubtless only

one of those paroxysms of gaiety and buffoonery that burst forth in youth like the blossoming of spring; for it is the happy age in which one laughs for laughing's sake over everything, at others, and at oneself. We may believe then that if Gautier treats of a subject, at once sweet and sad, having in it something legendary, he will treat it in the Romanticist fashion, with a few grindings of the teeth and suggestions of epilepsy. The first article which he published at his own fancy is dated 1833; it is the first pearl of this literary rosary that he tells with so sure, so elegant a hand, *le Nid de rossignols*—who does not remember it? Two sisters, young and beautiful, possess an exclusive love of music, and most marvellous voices; they enter into a contest with a nightingale which expires of jealousy, first confiding to them his nest containing three little ones crying out to be fed. The nightingales are adopted by the two singers, who, they also, die worn out by their passion while singing a song of superhuman beauty, which the little nightingales receive that they may repeat it before the eternal throne. "God afterwards made of these three nightingales the souls of Palestrina, Cimarosa, and the Chevalier Gluck." It is simply told, without any striving after superfluous poetry of style, without any eccentricities;

the expression is irreproachable, and the style already presents those qualities which give promise of the master hand. I feel that this is romantic, but I do not see in it any of the Romanticism such as it was conceived to be in 1833. One might say it was a protest; I am persuaded that it was not premeditated, but it is there none the less, all the more clear that it was spontaneous, and, so to say, unconscious. Unknown to himself, perhaps, Gautier was choosing his particular path. If *le Nid de rossignols* is a *début* in prose works of imagination, it does not much resemble that of Victor Hugo in his *Han d'Islande*, which trenches so nearly on the grotesque, that it descends into it oftener than one would wish.

This discretion from which Gautier never swerves, is the result of that balance of mind to which I have already called attention, and which was, whatever may have been said of it, one of the characteristic tokens of his talent. It is through it that he could hold aloof naturally from the caricatures and brutalities, of what he himself called the epileptic insanities of the repertory of the Bouffes-Parisiens, and unhealthy romances. Like the sculptures on the Temple of Apollo Epicurius, which represent the combat of the Centaurs and the Lapithæ, he remains correct and veracious, so to speak, in painting

the most violent scenes. That is how in his *Voyage en Espagne* he has been able minutely to relate the incidents of the bull-fights without ever falling into extremes or trivialities ; if he is present at a scene calculated to stir one's heart with disgust, he contents himself with saying :

"The last bull was abandoned to the amateurs, who invaded the arena in a tumult, and killed it with stabs of their knives, for such is the passion of Andalusians for these bull-fights, that they are not content to remain spectators, but must even take part in them, or they would retire unsatiated."

If such a fact had been reproduced by Lottin de Laval, Alphonse Brot, or Petrus Borel, what an orgie of epithets and a riot of superlatives we should have had ! Gautier, initiated into all the resources of the art of writing, understood that exaggerated expression neutralises the vigour of it, and weakens the effect.

In our day, when literary passions, and the disputes of the schools are calmed down almost to a state of collapse, we are surprised at the growing moderation of Gautier, for it does not quite agree with the fame that the ultra-Classicists of his time have awarded him. At the little-regretted time when I was still at college, one of our professors, a learned Greek scholar of some notoriety, would talk to us sometimes of the " intemperate in-

novators"—it was his phrase—who threw ballads into the garden of le Franc de Pompignan. One day we asked him what he thought of Théophile Gautier; he made a grimace, and replied: "I think nothing of him, for I have had no leisure as yet to study the Iroquois language." Among the followers of Marmontel, father of *Denys le tyran*, and La Harpe, the compiler of a *Philoctète*, which did not succeed in obscuring the memory of Sophocles, this opinion seems to have been general. They spoke of the looseness of his style, and accused him of drawing and quartering the French language. It is always so when passion leads superficial folk astray, and they are so numerous that their name is legion. All feeling of justice disappears, as is obvious enough at that time when they accused Victor Hugo's verses of being coarse, disconnected and rough, and when they repeated with joy this epigram, which was celebrated, and which the reader perhaps remembers:

"Où donc Hugo, juchera-t-on ton nom;
Justice enfin que faite ne t'a-t-on?
Quand donc au corps qu'académique on nomme
Grimperas-tu de roc en roc, rare homme?"[1]

[1] "Where then, Hugo, will they place thy name;
Why have they not at last done thee justice?
How soon into the Academic Corps, so named,
Wilt thou climb from rock to rock rare man?"

This was just a fit of ill-humour which quickly passed away no doubt? Not at all! Thirty years after the battle of *Hernani*, de Pongerville, author of a translation in verse of Lucretia, still spoke of "the terror of bad taste," and of "that interregnum of the arts in which literary demagogy raged, overturned all the glories of the past, and proscribed the talent which attempted to follow in the footsteps of our masters."[1]

We can understand after that that Théophile Gautier was not spared in this classical hue and cry; his long hair, his braided cloak, his hat of heterodox shape, made him a mark for all prejudiced eyes, so that he became the scape-goat for the sins of Romanticism; they ascribed to him every kind of enormity of which he had never been guilty, and he was regarded as the licensed subverter of the French language, that language which he honoured with so much knowledge, accuracy, and elegance. According to his detractors, who, in all good faith, looked upon themselves as people of taste *par excellence*, he was an impetuous writer without self-control, carrying to the point of absurdity the pursuit of the uncommon, throwing the nouns out of window, dishonouring the adverbs, and taxing

[1] See *Nouvelle Biographie générale*, published by Firmin Didot Bros., vol. iv., page 376.

his ingenuity to create uncouth words, the better to insult revered traditions. This accusation of being an incorrigible neologist was often brought against Théophile Gautier; is it at an end now? I won't answer for it, for it is the result of an error, and in certain countries error dies hard. In such a case it would be imprudent to be too positive, still I believe he never had need to invent a new word, those he knew being amply sufficient. His vocabulary was extraordinarily rich; there wasn't a word that he was unacquainted with; in his readings, which very nearly embraced the whole of French literary works from the Renaissance, he had collected expressive words that had fallen into disuse, and were hardly known to the learned, and quite unknown to the public; these he resuscitated, and restored to them the right of citizenship in the world of letters by employing them appropriately and wisely. In that way he rendered an important service to the French language, which the use of words exclusively adopted by "the world," the habit of not calling things by their right names but making use of euphemisms, and, in a word, conventionality, had singularly impoverished. He did not trouble himself much about shocking "the proprieties," but he took pains to speak French, and we must acknowledge that he succeeded. He

even succeeded without effort, for he wrote with extraordinary facility.

This facility declares itself at once in his MSS. The writing, small, round, well-formed, runs on without hesitation, almost without erasures from the first to the last page, and indicates a man sure of his thought and its expression. He always knows what he wishes to say, and how he will say it, and has only to occupy himself with the material part of it, for the work is done. Some one said to Racine one day:—

"What are you working at now?"

"I am just finishing a tragedy."

"When will it be played?"

"Very soon, I have only got to write it."

Gautier might have said the same. He looked upon facility in literary production as a sign of talent, and already in 1835, in his study of Scudéry, has stated his opinion on this subject.

"One of the first qualities of genius is richness, fertility. All the great writers have been enormously productive, and there has never been much merit in spending a long time over small things, whatever Malherbe and Balzac, and all those particular writers may say, whose brains were congested by the smoke of the midnight lamp, and who suffered from a strangury of thought."

His own facility was such that nothing put him out; he could work anywhere, in the midst of noise, in his own house, while talking, and in the street among the pedestrians and carriages. Nothing disconcerted him. It was in a printing office, shaken by the vibrations of the steam presses, in spite of the uproar of the workpeople at work, that he wrote his volume *Italia*, from which a printer's overseer cut away the MS. from under his very pen, ten lines at a time, so as to accelerate the composition. We might think that this faculty—very rarely carried to such a point—was the result of habit, and that he only acquired it by degrees, but that is a mistake, for he possessed it from earliest youth. One recalls that he lived in the rue du Doyenné, that domain of *la Bohème galante* to which I have already made allusion. His room-fellows, and the friends who visited them, were all young and uproarious, and did not offend in the habit of meditation favourable to work, and yet it was there, in the noisy studio which served as a reception-room, fencing and boxing school, ball-room, dining-room, and school for the study of the French horn, that he wrote in six weeks the second volume of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. That was in 1835 when he was just twenty-four.

The book appeared—what a hubbub! what a

scandal! people covered their faces and asked, "alas! is it possible?" They appealed to secular justice, and there was an outcry against immorality and obscenity, one hardly dared to own that one had held this volume of perdition in one's hand, but it was relished in secret, and no one died of it.[1] To-day it would hardly draw a smile from us, for the reading public resembles Mithridates a good deal, who had tasted so many poisons, and become so accustomed to them, that assafœtida sprinkled over with strychnine seemed tasteless to him. What indeed was all the fuss about? A rather seductive story, interspersed with incidents in which the author expresses his opinions, occasionally illuminating them with a few paradoxical fireworks. A young and very beautiful girl dresses up as a man, and chooses her adventures; she knows how to resume her own sex on occasion and to make good use of it; under her double costume, sometimes as a man, sometimes as a woman, she troubles all hearts, and one fine day disappears, leaving behind her, near a pillow which she would have

[1] A long time after, criticism smitten with high principles, is still choked with it: "The immorality of the details, the extravagance of the plot, the spirit and brilliance of the style, drew down criticisms upon this strange novel. Rarely even in those years of delirium had people been madder, more impertinent, more outrageous" (*Dictionnaire de la Conversation*, 1859, vol. x., p. 173).

done better not to go to sleep upon, a few beads from her necklace. Gautier has developed this subject with that love of literary form, and respect for language, which is to be seen in all his work. What may be pointed out as incongruous in it, is excused by the passionate pursuit of abstract beauty shown in it, for Gautier has singularly idealised the virago who served him as a model. Mademoiselle de Maupin was not an imaginary person at all, she was celebrated towards the end of the seventeenth century, and her memory was not yet effaced when I was a child. She was the daughter of Count Armagnac's secretary, called herself d'Aubigny and married an under clerk named Maupin, whom she left promptly to go off with a fencing master, who made a first-class fencer of her. Sometimes dressed as a man, sometimes as a woman, very pretty and daring, having all kinds of odd tastes, she once set fire to a convent, and carried off a nun for whom she felt some friendship. Of fine appearance, endowed with a charming voice, she came out at the opera, where she had a success in singing Lulli's music. She was a dangerous swordswoman, for, in consequence of a quarrel at a masked ball, she accepted three challenges all at once, and killed, so they say, all three of her adversaries. From Paris she went to Brussels, where she was the mistress of Count Albert de Bavière. She was expelled

from Brussels on account of some scandal, went from there to Spain, and returning to France, saw herself treated with scorn by the public which but lately had applauded her. She went into a convent, where she finished her days in 1707, at the age of forty-four.

If *les Jeune-France* is a protest against the surface absurdities of Romanticism, we might say that *Mademoiselle de Maupin* is a sort of reaction against the mania in force then, to make the soul play a part which should surprise it, and to belie love by reducing it to being—without anything else—but a union of hearts. Men forced their minds to soar in a kind of ether at once pure and devilish, which was not without leaving some traces of ridicule in many of the novels and verses of that time. It would seem as though Gautier wished to restore to the splendours of the earth, a literature that was lost in ideas of false sentiment, and in a platonic delirium, in which it only found emptiness and bombast. The book was none the less accused of being of an outrageous sensuality, and people dropped their eyes in speaking of it. There is a good deal of hypocrisy in the world's judgments; it praises with ecstasy books, that, because it is the thing, have been read with yawns, and turns away its head with a look of reproof, on hearing the title of a book mentioned which has been

read in secret with an over-excited if not depraved curiosity. Women excel in this kind of thing, it is they in general who make the success of what is called light literature, but the book which they read is never upon their table, it is in the drawer, at least if it is not under their pillow.

Fortunio, published in the *Figaro* of 1837, which was edited by Alphonse Karr, did not in the least calm the storm which had arisen about *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, on the contrary the accusation of immorality resounded louder than ever. Fortunio is a sort of Hindoo Maharajah, fabulously rich, who comes to Paris to try what can be done there with a great deal of money. The elegancies of Parisian life appear quite ordinary to him. A girl kept by him kills herself in despair at seeing herself abandoned, when he returns to the shores of the Ganges, after having said his say about modern civilisation. "Good-bye, old Europe, who think yourself young, try to invent a steam engine to turn out beautiful women, and find a new sort of gas to replace the sun—I shall return to the East, it is more simple." It seems to me that Fortunio was thus severe because he had unwisely chosen his surroundings. The impressions he received were bad because they came naturally from the company he frequented—the worst of all, idlers who fritter away an enormous social power—

money—without even knowing on what they might utilise it, and prostitutes, who traffic in themselves, and sell to the highest bidder that which no one can buy—love.

Fortunio goes away discontented with his experience, and disappointed in the illusions which he had made for himself. He puts no restraint upon himself either, but from time to time launches aphorisms which sound strange to our European ears. He gives utterance to "subversive opinions," and he "saps the foundations," as the ministerial journals of the day said, when any one was not of their opinion.

"He but hates his friends, and would feel more drawn towards philanthropy if men were monkeys; he can hardly restrain himself from cutting off the heads of the bourgeois who annoy him, and he curses the civilisation which has no other aim but to perch upon a pedestal the aristocracy of soap-boilers and candle-makers. God will be obliged one of these days to come and make over again the world's sphere, levelled by these hordes of charlatans, envious of all splendour and all beauty, who form modern nations; the newspapers contain considerations upon the state of the cabinets of Europe, written by men who have never learnt to read, and whom one would not even employ as valets."

"Literary demagogy!" exclaimed M. de

Pongerville; it was not that, but a writer's whim, an artist's fancy, the cry of the man who is bored, and thinks he would be happier in some other place. "*Fortunio* is a hymn to beauty, to riches, to happiness, the only three divinities recognised by us." It is Gautier who writes that in his preface, and we may believe it, but he does not see that the hymn which is sung resembles a *de profundis*. In his novel, beauty does not suffice to make one beloved, riches are powerless because they only aim at material satisfactions, and happiness is not met with, because we seek it in ephemeral joys. Behind the divinities whom he evokes, and to whom he sacrifices, a fourth creeps in, hostile to the others, always lying in wait, and invincible—satiety. Considered under this aspect the book is moral; but we only see the theories expressed in it, without taking into account the lugubrious *rôle* played by the characters, the boredom which assails them, and the *dénouement* which sends them away unsatisfied, one to death, and the other to the "voluptuous brutality so dear to Orientals."

In truth Europe, old as she is, had better things to offer to their riches, their curiosity, and their intelligence. The discerning reader does not doubt it, although the author has not said so. Behind Fortunio they saw Gautier,

and in the words of this Hindoo, so out of his element in Paris, they thought to perceive the expression of the writer's thoughts. In what was only the work of an exuberant, because very young, imagination, they were pleased to see a premeditated attack on society, and poor Gautier was treated like a Turk, by people who would at once have proclaimed the Chevalier de Lamorlière grand master of the graces. The outcry did not interfere with the success of the book, but it is possible that Théophile Gautier was affected by it, for writing to Sainte-Beuve in 1863, to give him some information he had asked for, he said.

"*Fortunio* was the last work in which I freely expressed my real thoughts; from that time the invasion of *cant*, and the necessity of submitting myself to newspaper proprieties, have thrown me upon purely physical description; I have enunciated no doctrine since then, and I have kept my thoughts to myself." [1]

Under date 1836 the covers of the books edited by Renduel announce *le Capitaine Fracasse.* Begun, abandoned, continued, thrown aside, modified in its general plan, taken up and finally completed, this book was only published twenty-five years later, being written as the exigencies of the *Revue nationale* required, which brought it out without interruption from

[1] Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, vol. I., p. 103.

December 25, 1861 to June 10, 1863. "It is a bill of exchange drawn in my youth, and which I have discharged in my mature years," said Gautier. It was indeed amply discharged, with compound interest. Among Gautier's prose works this novel holds the highest place; as the *Revue nationale* was a bi-monthly magazine, the author had time, so often lacking before, to do it in, and took delight in it. There was nothing to cramp his imagination, he could let it take wing, and he profited by it. It was a sort of rest in the midst of his labour and, as he said himself smilingly, an oasis in the desert of dramatic journalism. That he loved the characters he created is easily seen, he lingers over them and places their first meeting in the country around his native place, carried away perhaps by one of those remembrances of childhood dear to those whom the shadow of age is soon to reach, and for whom life has been without gentleness. No book, however, is more impersonal, the date of it even may remain undecided. Who reigned in France when it was written, the son of Marie de Médicis, or the son of Queen Hortense? We might be in doubt, for if in spite of a certain tendency to reproduce the language of the first period of the seventeenth century, we feel in every line the maturity of a contemporary master, the sur-

roundings in which the actors move, and their bearing, belong so entirely to a definite epoch, that at times we might think we were reading a fragment of memoirs left by some young lad from Bearn come to seek his fortune in Paris. Battles and adventures, comical incidents, strolling players, attacks by brigands, rapier thrusts, ambuscades, elopements, generosity, valour, chivalry, how it all crowds about the pen of the writer, uniting to form a charming whole! Is it improbable? We have no time to become aware of it, it is almost a fairy tale, the *dénouement* would make us believe it to be one, for the lovers marry, and the discovery of a treasure enriches the hero. It is a wonderful story, full of freshness and youth, admirable not only on account of the adventures which form the pattern of the fabric, but also from the skill which was required to weave it.

I picture to myself that often after having accomplished his task, and for the five hundredth time discoursed upon the first vaudeville to hand, or praised the feats executed by some horsewoman or other, Gautier, returned to his little house at Neuilly, must have been happy to find himself again with Isabella and the Seigneur de Sigognac; how he must have questioned them, listened to their confidences, and got them to tell him about those wonderful

combats which a knight of the Round Table would have envied, and out of which the young Gascon gentleman always came victorious. At their dictation he wrote with joy, for, if it was not verse, it was poetry. The memory of his first home, of the Château de la Misère, so extraordinarily depicted, painted with such keen eloquence, dominates the whole recital. We divine that the knight who leaves it poor, riding away on his old horse, escorted by his sorrowful dog and cat, accompanied on the first stage of his journey by the servant of his early childhood, will one day re-enter it and be greeted there with happiness and good fortune. We understand that he will escape all dangers, will hold his own against destiny, and will triumph over obstacles, and we are grateful to the author of a tale in which we do not encounter the sorrows, pre-occupations, and unsightlinesses of everyday life. What greater service can we render those to whom life is grey and heavy? Ah! how right George Sand was when she said: "We are an unfortunate race; that is why we have urgent need to find distraction from real life in the dissimilations of art; the more it lies, the more it amuses us."

Amongst the works of Gautier *le Capitaine Fracasse* is of an exceptional construction; the romance has been composed, "engineered"; it

is not only a bit of marqueterie, as they said, but a piece of furniture carried out on a premeditated plan, and all parts of which have been previously rough-hewn before being submitted to the hand of the artist. This fact should be remembered, for Gautier is much less of a novelist than a story-teller. Most of his stories, *Fortunio* among others, represent the crystallisation of his own dream. That need not surprise us, it could not be otherwise, for Théophile Gautier was always a dreamer. His pretended nonchalance had no other foundation; he lived in a sort of world of his own, where visions were naturally evoked, in the midst of which he found happiness; when anything forced him to leave the ghosts who were so dear to him he was annoyed, and such annoyance was of frequent occurrence. Like Gustave Droz, he would have said without hesitation: "The most substantial of this world's blessings is a dream to which we cling, and in which we lose ourselves." Let us recall Tiburce, who is the hero of *la Toison d'or*. "He would often remain for whole days on his divan, supported by piles of cushions, without uttering a word, his eyes closed, and his hands hanging down." The portrait is striking in its resemblance; it is Gautier just as his friends knew him, lost in his reverie, that is to say, in the work of his

brain. Like Tiburce, too, he was bold in thought, and timid in action. That was, in fact, one of the most striking characteristics of his nature; his uncurbed imagination was neutralized by an extreme timidity, and a horror of action; he was a dreamer, content to give the reins to his mind, or perhaps he was simply a sage, who knew that fiction is superior to reality.

Imagination is not like invention; the one is independent of the will, the other proceeds from it, or at least finds its power in it. A man can command his will, he cannot command his imagination; it comes and seizes upon him as it will, *flat ubi vult*, and tells him stories of which he is almost always the hero, stories gay, tender, or terrible, stories of times past, or of times to come; as fancy wills she leads the poet into all sorts of surroundings, times, and countries. Returned to earth, he recalls these adventures which he has passed through on the wings of fancy, writes them down, perhaps, to prolong the charm which he has felt, and a *story* is made, and the public applauds. Gautier was *Fortunio*, Tiburce, and the Abbé Romuald, he saw Omphale come towards him, he was Octavanus dreaming in the streets of Pompeii, that Octavanus who made for himself an ideal harem with Semiramis, Aspasia, Cleopatra,

Diana of Poitiers, Joan of Aragon, and a few other beautiful ladies of times of old.

It is because they were an episode in his intellectual life, that his stories are simple, almost without incidents, but full of feeling nevertheless, and communicating the emotion with which they palpitate. By that we can recognise the characters born of his fancy. At times the same phantom came to visit him at long intervals; Clarimonde of *la Morte amoureuse*, who came to him for the first time in 1836, remembers him in 1852, and appears under the name of *Aria Marcella*. I believe I should be right in saying that the dearest of his mistresses were the great courtesans, the queens, and princesses who inhabited his brain, and perhaps replaced, as far as illusion went, untrustworthy realities; in certain cases the waking dream has as much power as the sleeping one. Everything which recalled modern civilisation to him, which he found ill-clothed, poor, mediocre, and hopelessly monotonous, was odious to him, as he never ceased to repeat, and so his dream, his own good, comforting fairy, came to his aid; she re-constituted for him past civilisations, and made him live according to his taste, in surroundings the fabulous sumptuosity of which, whatever the poets may think, was never of this world. What matter? he created these splendours for

himself; they did exist for him, and he delighted in them.

He makes long excursions into the past, superior to his visit to Spain and to Italy, for it is a journey to the countries of tradition, embellished by the distance of centuries. He lives at Athens in the time of Pericles, and it is perhaps to him that Bachides of Samos gave his *chain of gold.* At Sardis he saw the last offshoots of the race of the Heraclides perish under the blows of Gyges, the lover of Nyssia. In Egypt he saw the waves of the Red Sea swallow up Pharoah's army, and later, under the dynasty of the Ptolomies, he counted the pulsations of the heart of Meiamoun falling at the feet of Cleopatra. It was in this way that he escaped from his own existence, and got away from himself, to go and seek strength in other times and other countries, amongst beings of his choice, who consoled him for his commonplace surroundings, and made their confidences to him, which he in his turn transmitted to his readers. Sometimes he even finds himself carried away into fantastic regions which have nothing in common with those to which alcohol conducted Hoffman, and Edgar Poe; what he tells us of them makes us long to go there.

They are in prose, these stories, but we feel in every line that they were written by a poet:

"Même quand l'oiseau marche, on sent qu'il a des ailes." [1]

Although they may often unfold themselves in the kingdom of the impossible, they seem to be real, for they have had an intellectual existence. The argument, as I have already said, is always of an extreme simplicity, but the writer has known how to adorn and develop it —sometimes to the point of almost making it disappear—with an elegant and elaborate form. Imagination has not spared itself, and the mounting of the precious stone is often more costly than the stone itself. This is an art which appeals to delicate minds, but which the public does not always enjoy, preferring dramatic incidents to originality of expression, and ingenuity of thought. It remains to be known whether to a real "votary" a jewel cut by Benvenuto Cellini is not worth more than a diamond, were it even the Regent. In art it is less the material than the workmanship that we have to consider. Without hesitation I should compare Théophile Gautier's stories to that little palace which he saw on the Grand Canal at Venice, and which he wished to buy: "Between two great buildings there is a delicious little palace, having one window and a balcony, but what a window, and

[1] "Even when the bird walks, we feel that it has wings."

what a balcony!—lace-work in stone, scrolls, guilloches, and open-work which one would only think possible by means of a punching-machine, such as is used to make the ornamental paper put round bon-bons." A window and a balcony—it is not much, but to a sculptor like Gautier, it is sufficient to charm the eyes of those who know how to look.

Now and again his dreamings made him acquainted with imaginary characters, who talked, were impassioned, and moved like actors on the stage of a theatre, and from this resulted one of his sweetest and most original fancies, *Une Larme du diable.* The prologue to this idyl seems to have been inspired by the beginning of Goethe's *Faust*, who himself took it from the first scene of the drama of *Job;* they might have made a worse choice. This "mystery," in which everything pleases, very nearly brought misfortune upon Théophile Gautier, when it appeared in 1855, added to some other pieces in a volume entitled *Théâtre de poche.* The Deity, implored by Magdalena to pardon Satan, replies: "The sentence is irrevocable—I cannot perjure myself like an earthly king."

At that time the "parquet," as they call it at the Palais de Justice, possessed but a moderate liking for literature. Gustave Flaubert and Baudelaire learnt something of this when they

had to appear in the dock at the police-court, a proceeding which naturally hastened the flowering of the fame due to their works. In the phrase quoted above, the bench saw an insidious allusion to the 2nd of December, and to the perjury of the President of the Republic, since become the Emperor Napoleon III. It was a hanging matter. Gautier was summoned before some Imperial functionary, who signified to him that he would be tried before the proper court, he and his editor, and that there would be a prison for them. Gautier, who had but a moderate taste for martyrdom, was dismayed, and said: "The fools, they want to send me to the Bastille!" Luckily he could show that this *Larme du diable*, attempt against the safety of the State, was only a reprint, that the first edition had appeared in 1839, under the rule of the parliamentary monarchy. As soon as it was made clear that the obnoxious allusion could only have been addressed to Louis Philippe, it received nothing but praise, and Gautier was left in peace; but the alarm had been disagreeable, and left an unpleasant impression upon him.

Although Gautier would have excelled in dialogue, as shown by *Une Larme du diable*, and though two of his pieces were played, and he has left important fragments of a comedy in

verse, at which he worked for several years, we cannot say of him without doing violence to the truth, that he was a dramatic author.[1] He lived on reveries, poetry, and fancies which had need of space in which to expand. The theatre exists above all in action, in effects springing from combinations more or less probable rather than in everyday expressions, often repeated, accepted commonplaces, which draw the attention and perhaps the applause of the public. To be able to move at ease within these narrow limits, to work up the progression of sentiments by a graduated series of acts which follow one another, requires art, a kind of natural gift, that may be increased by thought and experience, but which is not to be acquired unless the seeds are to be found in one's own temperament. Now Théophile Gautier did not possess this natural gift, and I believe that, in spite of his attempts, he understood his own limits in this respect. Hear what he says:

"The theatre absolutely excludes imagination.

[1] The piece to which I refer is entitled *L'Amour souffle où il veut;* according to an agreement signed in the month of February, 1850, it was destined for the Comédie Française. Gautier also intended to write an *Orestes*, and even began it. The twenty-eight verses of the first scene, the only ones he wrote, prove that he had taken his inspiration from Eschylus, but that he did not attempt a translation or an imitation.

Fantastic ideas stand out too much in relief there, and the footlights throw too strong a light upon the tender creations of the imagination. The pages of a book are more obliging; the impalpable ghost of an idea there rises silently before the reader, who only sees it with the eyes of his soul. In the theatre the idea is materialised; you can touch it with your fingers in the person of the actor; it puts on paint and rouge, wears a wig, and stands there upon its feet, near the prompter's box, listening and shouting. . . . Everything which departs from a certain number of situations, and accepted words, appears strange and monstrous, and this makes any innovation in the theatre most difficult and dangerous; the new scene almost always makes the piece a failure, but there is no example of a commonplace situation compromising a success."

And, after a few other considerations, he adds:

"The ode is the beginning of all things—the idea; the theatre is the end of all things—action; the one is mind, the other matter. It is only in old age that societies have a theatre; when they are decrepid, and can no longer support the small amount of ideality contained in the theatre, they have the circus as a resource. After comedians come gladiators, for the effect of all extreme civilisation is to substitute matter for mind, and the thing for the idea."

That was written in 1834. Was it of Théo-

phile Gautier, or Théophile de Viau that the author of the *Grotesques* was thinking when he spoke thus?

Gautier always loved abstract art, which he put into practice as much as he could, that is why he is so severe in his judgment upon the theatre, which he reproached with having need of so many accessories tending to the same end, to produce the necessary illusion. This illusion he wished to obtain through poetry alone, which does not admit of it, and which cannot act upon the public in the same way as dramatic action, surrounded by all the means which sustain and make the most of it. By way of retaliation, he amused himself—that is the real word for it—in putting his fancies upon the stage, surrounding them with the splendour of scenery and costumes, making groups of women go through evolutions, keeping time to the sounds of music, so as to give them the semblance of fairy-land, as they had appeared to him. They said it was to materialise his own fancies that he made the ballets *Gizelle*, *la Péri* and *Sakountala*, which have not been surpassed, and which up to now, at least, seem to have remained inimitable models. *Gizelle* was represented at the opera for the first time on June 28, 1841. Without insisting upon it, I will point out to Théophile Gautier's future biographers, that it is at this

date they should seek for what the Germans would call the turning point of his existence.

Literary, art, and dramatic criticisms, accounts of travels, stories, novels, novelettes, comedies, and ballets, Gautier treated them all with a talent that cannot be denied to him; he was always at work, ever repairing his exhausted energies. If he had been asked what he liked best of his work, I am sure, that recalling Alfred de Musset's verses, he would have replied:

"J'aime surtout les vers,—cette langue immortelle . . .
. . . Elle a cela pour elle
Que les sots d'aucun temps n'en ont su faire cas,
Que le monde l'entend et ne la parle pas." [1]

[1] "Above all I love poetry,—that immortal tongue . . .
. . . It has this for itself,
That the fools of all time have not known how to value it,
That the world hears but does not speak it."

CHAPTER V.

THE POET.

IN the letter of which I have already quoted a fragment, Théophile Gautier wrote to Sainte-Beuve: "If I had had the smallest fortune of my own, I should have given myself up solely to the pursuit of the poet's laurels." And he complains of having fallen into prose; we see that the downfall was not mortal, for he excelled in both the forms of literature in which thinkers and dreamers hold communion with the multitude. This regret at not being able to be exclusively a poet haunted his life; as early as 1841 he wrote in an album:

"O poëtes divins! je ne suis plus des vôtres!
On m'a fait une niche où je veille, tapi
Dans le bas d'un journal, comme un dogue accroupi."[1]

[1] "Ah, divine poets, I am no longer one of you!
They have made me a niche where I keep watch, crouching
In the depths of a journal, like a crouching mastiff."

In truth, everything that in the course of his existence turned him from poetry, to which he came back unceasingly and passionately, seemed to him an attempt directed not only against his will, but against the most imperative need of his nature. He did not appraise the art of poetry so highly when he made his first appearance in 1830, for in the preface to his *Poésies*, he makes a confession which we shall do well only to believe in part.

"The author of the present book is a chilly, sickly young man, who spends his life in company with two or three friends, and about as many cats; a space of a few feet where it is less cold than elsewhere is to him the universe. The chimney-piece is his sky, the back of the fireplace his horizon. He makes verses in order to have a pretext for doing nothing, or does nothing under pretext of making verses."

These are just the ideas of a young conscript of letters, not yet aware that sincerity ought to be the first qualification of every brave man who holds a pen; then to give himself some importance, the young man of nineteen pretends not to take himself seriously; it is all natural enough, but he would not be very pleased to be taken at his word.

Of this volume, which appeared in the midst of the hubbub raised by the royal ordinances of

July 25, 1830, there is nothing to be said; we can only recall the statement placed by Alfred de Musset at the head of the *Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie*, "My first verses are those of a child." Youth, like the birds, sings by instinct; it is intoxicated with its own melody, and cherishes hopes of it which most often end quickly in disappointment, for what it took for promise, is only the voice of illusion. How many youths scarcely out of their University long clothes, with eyes fixed on the heavens, have not imagined themselves to be guided by a star, when they have been but following a will-o'-the-wisp? Such was not the case with Gautier, who was a magi of poetry, the star which he saw shining at the dawn of his spring-time, had lost nothing of its brilliancy in the twilight of his autumn; it was less fiery perhaps—less "truculent" he would have said—but of a more sparkling shimmer, persistent, and with an aureole of golden rays.

In poetry Théophile Gautier made his first real appearance in *Albertus*, a fantastic poem which made a noise in its time, and which is the gage of adhesion that he gave to Romanticism. The volume is dated 1832, the verses contained in it were composed during the preceding year, when the poet was twenty, the age likewise of the poem. The very choice of the subject indicates the date; one could not be mistaken in it.

Gautier has related in *les Jeune-France* the history of Daniel Jovard, a Classicist by conviction, who became converted to Romanticism, and a Hugo worshipper, after having been baptized in the name of the *Odes et Ballades*, the preface to *Cromwell*, and *Hernani*. Before the falling of the thunderbolt he exclaims :

"O muses ! chastes sœurs, et toi, grand Apollon,
Daignez guider mes pas dans le sacré vallon ;
Soutenez mon essor, faites couler ma veine,
Je veux boire à longs traits les eaux de l'Hippocrène." [1]

But the moment—death and damnation !—that a fresh blast of inspiration has penetrated his manly breast, he changes his song, deserts the choir led by Phœbus the violinist, and in a breath goes straight to the witches sabbath—I would say to the charivari :

"Par l'enfer ! je me sens un immense désir,
De broyer sous mes dents sa chair, et de saisir,
Avec quelque lambeau de sa peau bleue on verte,
Son cœur demi-pourri dans sa poitrine ouverte !" [2]

[1] "Ye Muses, chaste sisters, and thou, great Apollo,
Deign to guide my steps into the sacred valley,
Support my strain, make my thoughts to flow,
I would drink in deep draughts, the waters of Hippocrene."

[2] "By hell ! I feel an immense desire
To crush between my teeth his flesh, and to seize
With some shreds of his skin, blue or green,
His heart, half rotten within his open breast !"

Let the reader be re-assured, Théophile Gautier is not Daniel Jovard, and his poetry smacks less of death. It is much more in the subject matter, than in the composition of the verses, that *Albertus* adheres resolutely to Romanticism. I mean a Romanticism violent, determined, and ultra-revolutionary, which was only inspired to be weird, and deadly, and raving. A decrepid sorceress changes herself by aid of her philters into a young woman of irresistible beauty, who allures to her the painter Albertus, with whom she is in love, intoxicates him, makes him madly in love with her, and then suddenly becomes again a horrible old hag, gets astride her broomstick, and carries off to the witches sabbath her lover of an hour, who is found the next morning on the Appian Way, with "his back broken and his neck twisted." When he has ended this account, which comprises no less than one thousand four hundred and seventy-two verses, the poet seeks repose by his fireside:

"Donnez-moi la pincette et dites qu'on m'apporte
Un tome de Pantagruel." [1]

The verse is much less confused, less "fantastic" than might be expected from so strange a theme,

[1] "Give me the tongs, and tell them to bring me
A volume of Pantagruel."

borrowed from one of those narratives of naïve and coarse morality, in which the country folk of the Middle Ages used to revel tremblingly in their long night watches. If the words have sometimes rather too racy a flavour, if the expression strains after an originality which it almost always attains to, the verse is good and sound, without any attempt at metrical gymnastics. It is young—what a good fault!—and seeing it so vigorous and lively, we divine that maturity will soon come to give it that robust and healthy form which it will never forsake. I have had much pleasure in re-reading *Albertus*, it is certainly a poem of youthful prime, of the age of audacities, of the storming of fortresses, and indefatigable ardour. Gautier speaks of it with a sort of paternal tenderness; he loved it rather as we love those old airs heard in our childhood, which bring back memories in which the soul finds again tender impressions.

This poem is interesting too from other points of view, for it reproduces the ideas afloat at that time. Gautier was just leaving Rioult's studio; but we must not attribute to that the abuse of names of painters to be found in *Albertus*—six in the three first stanzas. The *Cénacle* had dreamed of uniting literature and painting, a prudent match which divorce quickly put an end to, was bound to put an end to, for the genesis

and procedure of these two arts, the aim which they had in view, the impression which they may produce, offer so many differences that "incompatibility of temper" arises between them. Much more appropriately than of the theatre Gautier might have said: "The one is the idea, the other matter." The tendencies of the Romanticist school in painting are clearly pointed out, without the author seeming to have any doubts of them. Albertus is a painter; the reader is conducted into his studio, where the sketches on the canvasses declare the prepossessions which at that time dominated the artistic world:

"Antour du mur beaucoup de toiles accrochées . . .
. . . La Lénore à cheval, Macbeth et les Sorcières,
Les Infants de Lara, Marguerite en prières." [1]

That seems to be nothing, but it is a great deal. The David school had adopted the nude, which is the abstract human creature, and antique drapery, which is abstract costume; it was difficult of execution and the apprenticeship was long. It is certain that the Theseus, the Achilles, and the Hectors were tiresome, when they did not attain to perfect beauty, and they substituted

[1] "Around the walls hung many canvasses . . .
. . . Lénore on horseback, Macbeth and the witches,
Lara's children, Margaret in prayer."

for them historical figures, legendary and romantic, wearing hose and doublet, and boots up to the knees. As a result the nude disappeared, instead of painting men, they painted stuffs, and the study of anatomy, on which, in teaching drawing, so much care had been bestowed before 1830, was actually so entirely neglected, that it no longer existed, to the great detriment of art. In short, it was Romanticism which gave us instead of historical painting, anecdotal painting. The often excessive dimensions of the canvasses upon which they are spread do not give to them the qualities which are wanting to make them great art.

The exaggeration of feeling brought into fashion by *Hernani:*

"Oh! qu'un coup de poignard de toi me serait doux!"[1]

The inflated metaphors familiar to budding Romanticism, appear in some stanzas, and prove to what an extent people were fatigued by the incessant repetitions in which the Classicists delighted. Gautier, who was generally so scrupulous in the employment of imagery, who said, "My metaphors hold good, that is everything," in writing *Albertus* could not resist extrava-

[1] "Ah! how sweet from thee would be the stroke of a dagger!"

gance of expression. A letter thrown into the fire writhes like one of Dante's lost souls; Veronica (the witch) writes a note:

". . . Sa main rapide en son essor,
Comme un cheval de course à New Market, a peine
Effleure le papier."[1]

This bombast, which by inflating the words makes them appear empty, had not yet been abandoned by Gautier. Hear the declaration of love which Albertus makes to his mistress:

"Un ange, un saint du ciel, pour être à cette place,
Eussent vendu leur stalle au paradis de Dieu,
. . . et je vendrais mon âme
Pour t'avoir à moi seul, tout entière et toujours."[2]

How often that phrase will be repeated, and become as commonplace as Aurora with the rosy fingers; it will remain in the Romanticist glossary, and if Gautier sets it vibrating in one of his stanzas it seems to me excusable, for he

[1] ". . . Her hand, rapid in its flight,
Like a race-horse at Newmarket, scarce
brushes the paper."

[2] "An angel, a saint from heaven, to be in my place
Would sell their seat in God's paradise,
. . . And I would sell my soul
To have thee to myself alone, entirely, and for ever."

was not yet of age. We might say that he furnished the theme which so many others have taken up. The master himself, in the height of his glory, did not disdain to make Ruy Blas speak in 1838 as Albertus did in 1832:

"Oh! mon âme au démon, je la vendrais . . .
Oui, je me damnerais! . . ." [1]

It is just by reason of its exaggeration that this thought has been so often reproduced; it doubtless only became a commonplace because it had been admired when it was expressed for the first time.

Romanticism revolutionised theatrical art; in the first place by particularising the action, instead of generalising, but above all by replacing tragic harangues, by the action of the drama. Instead of recounting the death of Hippolyta and the passing away of Phèdre, they took place upon the stage. Let us recall Victor Hugo's dramas in prose or verse, there is not one that has not its murder, like those of Shakespeare. The new school had at its disposition a special medicine chest full of poisons, "which mixed with wine, change wine of Romorantin into wine of Syracuse," and antidotes, "known to none

[1] "Ah! my soul, I would sell thee to the evil one . . .
Yes, I would damn my own soul! . . ."

but the Pope, M. de Valentinois and Lucretia Borgia." They likewise possessed a set of carefully selected armoury which made killing a certainty. People delighted in these brutalities, and five coffins, escorted by monks in their vestments, did not at all displease the spectators. If Romanticism was guilty of some excesses, we must remember that the public was a party to them. At the theatre nothing was to be hidden, in poems and novels everything was to be told, exercising, however, a certain amount of consideration for bourgeois prudery, and not dashing full tilt against the prejudices of the police-court. The clouds with which Homer envelops Jupiter and Juno on Mount Ida, were no longer admissible in the Romanticist sky, which wished to unveil itself altogether, and where the good Marmontel would have said as in *les Incas:* "His eyes beheld a thousand charms," they would give a minute account of the charms, for the love of art. That was the law, and Théophile Gautier did not try to elude it. At the moment when Albertus begins with Veronica one of those private conversations which gain by remaining secret, the poet takes up the word and says:

"C'est ici que s'arrête en son style pudique,
Tout rouge d'embarras, le narrateur classique. . . .

. . . Moi qui ne suis pas prude et qui n'ai pas de gaze,
Ni de feuille de vigne à coller à ma phrase,
Je ne passerai rien." [1]

And in fact he did not omit anything, and "frantic mirth" mingles in just proportion with "ecstatic mirth," interspersed with a few Italian words. Literary passion would have it so; in certain poems and novels of that time, signed with celebrated names, you would without trouble find descriptions which were certainly not written *ad usum Delphini*. After *Albertus*, Théophile Gautier published *la Comédie de la mort*, a poem to which he added the poetry composed from 1833 to 1838. The author has fixed the dates: "At one o'clock in the afternoon of Thursday, January 25, 1838, I finished this present volume: glory be to God, and peace and goodwill towards men." The book was published by Désessart, who did not pay for it.[2]

[1] "Here the classic narrator in his prudish way,
Quite red with embarrassment, would stop. . . .
. . . I who am not a prude and have no veil,
Nor fig leaf to put upon my phrase,
I shall omit nothing."

[2] In the month of April, 1890, I bargained at a second-hand bookstall for a copy of the first edition of this volume. It was in large octavo, 376 pages, and in a good state of preservation —the price was £12 (300 francs).

I should not be surprised if *la Comédie de la mort* was not inspired, but suggested, by Edgar Quinet's *Ahasuerus*, which made a great noise when it appeared in 1833, stirring up problems which disturbed more than one of the greatest minds. To question life and death, to discover to what end man was created, was tempting to a poet, even though he knew that neither life nor death could reply to the question that humanity has been asking ever since its birth, and will continue to ask as long as we exist. It belongs to the unknown, the insolvable. Like many others, Théophile Gautier wished to study this problem, and he has written a poem to which he might have given as epigraph, the last words spoken by Sir Walter Raleigh, before kneeling upon the scaffold which his former mistress, she whom England still names the Great Elizabeth, had caused to be erected for him. "Time has robbed us of our joys and our youth, a little dust, in the dark and silent grave, is all that will remain of us." [1]

The poet wanders among the tombs, the dead speak to him and entrust him with their secrets, which tell him nothing, he knows as much as they do, for they are his own thoughts which he expresses by their voices from beyond the grave.

[1] See Sir Walter Raleigh's verses, found in his Bible in the Gate House at Westminster. (Trans.)

Raphael thought the human race was dead, because it no longer knew how to paint. Faust, oppressed with the nothingness of science, gives us this precept which every wise person should listen to:

"Ne cherchez pas un mot qui n'est pas dans le livre;
Pour savoir comme on vit n'oubliez pas de vivre:
Aimez, car tout est là!"[1]

Don Juan, the legendary Don Juan, the man of rapes, seductions, and impiety, a type of "libertine" such as the seventeenth century understood it, which had not invented "the free-thinker" whom we meet with in our day, is no more contented than Faust; he, too, acknowledges his error:

"Trompeuse volupté, c'est toi que j'ai suivie,
Et peut-être, ô vertu! l'énigme de la vie,
C'est toi qui la savais."[2]

Gautier makes of Don Juan a man who seeks among the crowd of women the ideal woman

[1] "Seek not for a word which is not in the book,
To know how we live, forget not to live,
Love, for everything lies in that!"

[2] "Deceitful voluptuousness, it is thee whom I have followed,
And perhaps, O Virtue! it is thou who knowest it,
This mystery of life."

seen in his dream; good, but then she was only to exist in order to be able to love. Don Juan, as I conceive him, does not care much about being loved, he wishes to love, and cannot, which makes him a son of Satan.

Napoleon, "that sovereign prince, patron of hazardous deeds," as Montaigne would have said, appeared in his turn; glory, ambition, the noise of battle, the shouts of triumph, what does it all come to? Instead of being a conqueror, whose name filled the world, and will ring on into posterity, would it not have been more worth while to be a goatherd playing upon his simple flute to please Galatea? And yet not one of these dead people, chosen from among the most celebrated, the most envied, was content with his lot. In this they resemble the living. In his interrogatory the poet learnt nothing, had he questioned Çakya-Mouni, Mahomed, and Moses, he would not have known any more. Short or long, unhappy or prosperous, life remains an undecipherable problem; that is why every hypothesis is allowable to prolong it, and re-animate it above terrestrial limits, for, by itself, isolated from the hereafter, which human conceptions attribute to it, it is incomprehensible.

La Comédie de la mort would seem to have been Gautier's adieu to Romanticism, its influ-

ence is still strong, as well in the thought that inspired the verses, as in the form in which they are clothed ; later he emancipates himself from it, and his originality appears free, stripped of all reminiscence. The verses which follow this funereal poem, are exempt from the romantic despair, which is so exaggerated that we hardly believe in it, but we find frequent traces of the unwholesome melancholy, which at that time led so many young men to commit suicide. Gautier was then about twenty-five, the age of sadness without a motive, and languors without cause, and he did not escape them.

" Allez dire qu'on creuse
Sous le pâle gazon
Une tombe sans nom.
Hélas ! j'ai dans le cœur une tristesse affreuse ! " [1]

In *Thébaïde*, which is an appeal to Nirvana, in *le Trou du serpent* and *le Lion du cirque* we can, without much seeking, find traces of that inertia to which dreamers, more than any others, are exposed. This note of sadness, which vibrates like a stifled sob, has nothing affected in it, it is

[1] " Go tell them to dig
Under the dull sod
A grave without a name.
Alas ! my heart is full of intolerable sadness ! "

natural, and is only a sign of the state of the soul. It is true that in the *Ténèbres*, a very beautiful piece written in 1837, Gautier gives a verse that seems to have been composed to serve as a motto for his whole existence, which was so full of resignation, and at times so empty:

"Je suis las de la vie et ne veux pas mourir!"[1]

These lugubrious songs did not last long, they vanished like clouds, which disperse at the breath of the wind, the sun reappears, the poet recovers himself, and exults when he has worked well:

"Par Apollo! cent vers! je devrais être las;
On le serait à moins, mais je ne le suis pas.
Je ne sais quelle joie intime et souveraine
Me fait le regard vif et la face sereine."[2]

He sings of love, of the woods and fields, and the first May beams; he has forgotten Albertus and Veronica, the witches sabbath, the daggers of Toledo, and the slashed doublets; of his

[1] "I am tired of life, and yet I would not die!"

[2] "By Apollo! a hundred verses! I ought to be tired;
Some at least would be so, but I am not.
I know not what inward and all-powerful joy
Makes my glance so bright, my face serene."

borrowed plumes nothing remains. When life weighs too heavily upon him he does not invoke angels or demons, but addresses a hymn to

"Sommeil, dieu triste et doux, consolateur du monde." [1]

Thus, at the age in which all excess is permissible, and when even a little folly is not out of place, he played truant at the school of Romanticism, found his own path, and followed it without wavering. There were not many who imitated him, simply because they were far, very far from having his worth. They clung obstinately to forms, the very excess of which made them at once as obsolete as the forms borrowed from the pseudo-classic. Having no thoughts of their own, they distorted the ideas of others which they did not understand, forgetting that the attempt to be original when one is not so, naturally leads to ridicule, and they threw discredit upon the movement that Victor Hugo, Lamartine, Alfred de Musset, and Théophile Gautier started with so much ability. Gautier wrote of *les Grotesques* of bygone days; if some well-advised critic could seek out the grotesques of Romanticist poetry from 1830 to about 1845, I promise him an anthology which

[1] "Sleep, sweet sad god, comforter of the world."

we should not scorn on those days when we are a prey to the blue devils.

In the author of the verses completing the volume of *la Comédie de la mort*, the earliest of which date from 1838, it is not difficult to recognize the artist who was to paint the enamels, (Émaux), and cut the cameos, (Camées). Certain of the smaller pieces, exquisite in composition and colour, seem like the sisters of those which were to spring forth ten years later, and are, so to speak, the favourite children, the comforters, of the saddened poet. The rhythm is different, but the sentiment is the same, and it is certainly the future author of the *Coquetterie posthume* who wrote:

> " Celle que j'aime à présent, est en Chine ;
> Elle demeure, avec ses vieux parents,
> Dans une tour de porcelaine fine,
> Au fleuve jaune où sont les cormorans." [1]

And many others which might be quoted, and which the reader has already thought of, such as *la Caravane*, *la Chimère*, *le Sphinx* and *Pastel*, which one is never tired of repeating.

[1] " She whom I love at present is in China,
She dwells, with her aged parents,
In a tower of fine porcelain,
By the yellow stream where the cormorants are."

In this volume, octosyllabic verses are rare, and yet that was to be the definite form adopted by Théophile Gautier. Already in his sketch of *Scarron* he adopts it, praises it, and cries it up.

"The verse of eight syllables and even rhymes," he says, "offers facilities which make it difficult not to abuse it. In the hands of a mediocre versifier, it soon becomes more mean and bald than slovenly prose, and, to compensate the ear, only offers us a rhyme fatiguing from its apposition. Skilfully handled, this verse, which is that used in the Spanish Romances and Comedies, can produce new and varied effects; . . . it appears to us to be more characteristic than the pompous and redundant Alexandrine; . . . it would save us a good many stereotyped hemistiches, which it is difficult for the best and most careful poets to avoid, so much do the exigencies of the divisions and rhymes of hexameter verse call for them."

This verse of eight syllables, rather looked upon with contempt formerly, almost exclusively reserved for burlesque writing, and which was called burlesque verse, Théophile Gautier took up, and made of it the mould of precision in which he cast his thoughts.

In the volume *Émaux et Camées*, that volume at which he worked during the last twenty years of his life, he has only employed, with the exception of three pieces, the stanzas of four octo-

syllabic verses with alternate rhymes, and he has made a remarkable effect with it. Every one of the fifty-five pieces that compose this collection, is a jewel, cut by the hand of the master, cut with deliberation, with affection, often corrected, and always improved. As soon as he felt himself free and at leisure—"leisure the tenth and most inspiring of the muses," he says—he took refuge in himself, refusing all other inferior preoccupation, and returned once more for himself, for his own enjoyment, to the making of poetry, which he loved so well. He has related this exactly in the *Émaux et Camées*, in terms which I shall quote, for they give a very clear idea of the solidity of his verses, and of the relief which he found in making them:

"Mes colonnes sont alignées
Au portique du feuilleton;
Elles supportent, résignées,
Du journal le pesant fronton.

Jusqu'à lundi je suis mon maître.
Au diable, chefs-d'œuvre mort-nés!
Pour huit jours je puis me permettre
De vous fermer la porte au nez.

Les ficelles des mélodrames
N'ont plus le droit de se glisser
Parmi les fils soyeux des trames
Que mon caprice aime à tisser.

Voix de l'âme et de la nature
J'écouterai vos purs sanglots,
Sans que les couplets de facture
M'étourdissent de leurs grelots.

Et portant, dans mon verre à côtes,
La santé du temps disparu,
Avec mes vieux rêves pour hôtes,
Je boirai le vin de mon cru ;

Le vin de ma propre pensée,
Vierge de toute autre liqueur,
Et que, par la vie écrasée
Répand la grappe de mon cœur." [1]

[1] "My columns stand arow
At the portico of the feuilleton
They support resignedly
The journal's pediment.

Till Monday I am my own master.
To the devil with still-born masterpieces
For eight days I can have the joy
Of shutting the door in your faces.

The threads of melodramas
Have no longer a right to glide
Among the silken strands of the weft
It pleases my caprice to weave.

Voices of the soul and of nature,
I will listen to your thrilling accents
Without letting the couplets, made to order,
Distract me with their tinkle.

This little quite personal piece, at once so keen and so sad, seems to be a bit of advice to the reader, for it is immediately followed by the one written by the poet during his journalistic holidays—*le Château du Souvenir.* He sits alone beside his hearth on a foggy day, and the ghosts of his childhood, and of his youth, come to keep him company. They people his solitude, their dim voices speak of the things that are no more, of the good things of the past, which we think are forgotten, and which are only slumbering, and will awake in our hours of melancholy. Our first homes stamp their silhouettes on the cloudy horizon, our first mistresses return, and seem to rise from their graves, in the attitudes which the heart remembers,—she whose beauty bursts forth like a pomegranate in summer, she who is like a flower in pastel, a shadow in a ball-dress, she who resembles the wicked Venus presiding at odious amours, to whom we might say:

And drinking from my ribbed glass
To the health of times gone by,
With my old dreams for guests,
I will drink the wine of my own vineyard.

The wine of my own, own thought,
Unmixed with other brewage,
And which, through the bruised life,
Pours forth the grapes of my heart."

"O toi qui fus ma joie amère,
Adieu pour toujours . . . et pardon!" [1]

Then, in their turn, the old comrades of the *Cénacle* rise up and sound the flourish of trumpets of their youth, the poet sees himself again, and can hardly recognize himself; that it is himself, however, there is no question, the portrait leaves no doubt of it:

"Dans son pourpoint de satin rose,
Qu'un goût hardi coloria,
Il semble chercher une pose
Pour Boulanger ou Devéria.

Terreur du bourgeois glabre et chauve,
Une chevelure à tous crins
De roi franc ou de lion fauve
Roule en torrent jusqu'à ses reins." [2]

[1] "Oh, thou who wast my bitter joy,
Adieu for ever . . . and pardon!"

[2] "In his doublet of rose-coloured satin,
Which a daring taste has coloured,
He seems to seek a pose
For Boulanger or Devéria.

Terror of the citizen smooth and bald,
His hair, like the mane
Of a Frankish king or tawny lion,
Rolls in a torrent down to his waist.'

He lingers over his memories, and with them reviews the age which he regrets, the past fills him with a charm to which he longs to abandon himself; but the present, ever exacting, ever inopportune, knocks at his door, drags him out of his dream and "tells him in vain to forget." Of a tender sadness, profoundly human, without any repinings or recriminations, this piece seems to me one of the most beautiful of the *Émaux et Camées.*

For the rest they all possess superior qualities, not one of them is mediocre, and they have this in particular in Théophile Gautier's work, that they were for the most part inspired by incidents in his life. There are few to which one could not put a name. It is of course not a question of a poem "with a key," but every one of these detached poems wears a mask, which it is easy to raise, and behind which is hidden the face of some dear phantom, whose smile seems to hover above the verses which glorify them.

What a distance lies between these stanzas, where trembles a soul sorrowful but serene, always enamoured of the beautiful, artistic in every conception, still eager in spite of the clouds which weigh upon it, how far lies this generous wisdom, from the satanic furies of *Albertus*, and the lugubrious inquests of *la Comédie de la mort!* Time has done its work.

Man resembles the silex, which falls from the cliffs and glides into the sea. When the stones escape from the chalky coating which envelopes them, they appear angular, denticulated, and bristling with points. The ocean receives them, tosses them about in its tempests, rocks them with its rhythmic movements, and throws up on the shore the rounded pebble, always hard and resistant, holding within it that inner spark which flashes forth at the least blow, but having lost with the action of the waves—I was going to say of the years—the asperities with which it was disfigured in its primitive days. Of the eccentricities of his youth, much more apparent in his verse than in his prose, Gautier, as he grew older, only kept the vigour, and originality, of which they were the indication.

All the pieces of *Émaux et Camées* are composed with a master art which nothing can disturb, and for which poetry has no secrets. They are constructed on a definite plan, from which the author does not turn aside; the rhyme, let it be never so difficult, never carries him away from the path which he has traced for himself, for he forces it to obey, and it obeys, coming at the given point to complete his thought, according to the intended form, and the chosen rhythm. It is an uncommon merit, which only the good workers in the art of making verses can appre-

ciate. In this volume, more perhaps than in any other, Théophile Gautier has put in practice the theory which he developed with so much reason, when, speaking of the *Stances et Poèmes* of Sully Prudhomme, he said:

"The smallest pieces possess the merit of being composed, of having a beginning, a middle and an end, of aiming at an object, of expressing a precise idea. A sonnet calls for a plan as much as an epic poem, and the most difficult to compose in poetry, as well as in painting, is a single figure. Many authors forget this law of art, and their works show it for neither perfection of style, nor the wealth of the rhymes, can redeem this fault."

In his youthful poems, as well as in those of his mature age, Gautier possesses a rare quality, so rare that I do not meet with it as a permanent condition except with him—I mean grammatical correctness. Let no one exclaim at this; to have a proper respect for grammar is an exceptional thing among poets. The greatest of the Classicists and the Romanticists take it very easily, under every sort of pretext, more plausible than real, they resolutely run foul of mistakes in syntax, which they baptize under the name of poetical licence. Agreement of the tenses is particularly distasteful to them, and when they

are embarrassed by a subjunctive, they promptly replace it by a solecism. That is allowed or at least tolerated, and they are not at all numerous, those who have refused these flights, which the very contexture of the verses even often call for, and which in our day there seems to be some inclination to adopt in prose. In this respect Théophile Gautier is never false to himself; he uses towards himself a severity which his profound knowledge of the French language made easy to him perhaps, but which must none the less be pointed out. Above all it comes from the fact that he attached great importance to form, and that he could not understand form without correctness.

This preoccupation over purity of style, is incessant with Gautier, dominates him, and never leaves him ; it is apparent in the first hours of his literary life, in his abundant prose, in his verse sometimes to excess, and we find it again, imperious and obeyed, when having attained to complete mastery, he prunes his phrases, and transposes with perspicacity, what he has seen and what he has dreamed.

He arrives at suppressing metaphors almost entirely; we might say that the apparatus of similies appears to him to be too complicated. He replaces them with a picturesque word drawn unconsciously towards the simplicity which is

the characteristic of writers born and bred. To be simple is, I believe, the best means of being understood by the public, and it is what every sincere author seeks after, although there are some who have pretended, or wish to pretend, that they only write for a limited number of readers. Joubert gave excellent advice to M. Molé, when on October 21, 1803, he said to him: "Always strive to write in such a manner that a clever child could very nearly understand you, and that a deep thinker may find something to meditate upon in you." On the whole, to be understood by all the world is the writer's ambition, and those who say that they do not trouble about it, make us think that they are not sincere.

Form! I know what Bridoison thinks of it, nevertheless it is a grave question, which has often been agitated precisely apropos of Théophile Gautier, who has been reproached without very serious grounds, with having sacrificed too much to it. They have set down as a fault in him, a quality which was natural to him, which he developed by study, or, to put it better, by the very exercise of his art. He had his form, entirely his own, exclusive, so to speak, and he perfected it as much as he could, he loved it, not hiding the fact from himself, but he never attempted to impose it on others. Form is not of

one kind happily, it is manifold, and must be so under pain otherwise of becoming utterly wearisome. Form corresponds to our ideas, adapts itself to them, and turns them to account. Each one has his own, which shows itself for what it is worth, and in such a matter imitation is synonymous with sterility. Bossuet's prose does not resemble Voltaire's in the least, neither does Voltaire's resemble Pascal's, nor Pascal's Montesquieu's. Here we have four different forms, and admirable ones too. Is one superior to another? We may doubt it, it is a question of the reader's taste, who is always free to judge by predilection.

A phrase has been used which would have infatuated Gautier. That is quite possible, for the Romanticist of 1830, the member of the *Cénacle*, was not at all averse from the use of paradoxes; but that he would have accepted this phrase as a maxim of Art, proper to serve as a motto and rallying word for a school of literature, I do not believe. In spite of the irony which concealed his gentleness, and a certain simple-mindedness, which his experience of life could not entirely destroy, and which often led him to adopt for a moment, formulas the strangeness of which had charmed him, in spite too of his good nature, which made him readily accept the opinions of his interlocutors, he possessed an imperturbable good sense that

his artistic eccentricities, the æsthetic discussions in which he had been mixed up, his own fancy even, never disturbed, and he was incapable—if the expression may be allowed—of believing the moon to be made of green cheese.

If in his presence any one had proclaimed this aphorism, "Out of form comes the idea," he would have adopted it at once, without reserve, as though he had discovered the solution of a long-sought problem, or the expression of one of those striking truths which no honest soul can reject. I believe we have been mistaken in this matter. Gautier's convictions in matters of Art were so strong, that it was not difficult to him to remain indifferent to the opinions of others. Indeed he often pretended to approve of them, so as to avoid discussion, which he did not like, for he knew how barren and sometimes disloyal it is. Gautier certainly took pains with his form, attributing great importance to it—as the whole of his work shows—but he knew that it was only the agent for the transmission of ideas. His opinion did not go beyond the Saint Simonian theory, which makes of one the equal of the other. That in the intimacy of friendly converse with literary companions, he should have abandoned himself to those sallies of wit which were natural to him, has nothing astonishing in it; but if he had

suspected that they would be collected and published later, he would have kept them to himself, and would have amused himself with them in the privacy of his own mind. That literary form never receives enough attention, he believed, and he was right. He repeated it to whoever would listen to him, but between that and saying that form is the mother, the generatrix of ideas, lies an abyss, and this abyss his reason never overstepped. Under the most admirable forms of French literature, we always find the fact or the thought of which it is only the envelope; the one shows the other off without doubt, but the second can, up to a certain point, do without the first, and make its own way in the world.

Is it really its form that constitutes the beauty of the Arvers sonnet? To prepare himself for it, Stendhal read up one or two chapters on civil law, and one sees it in his style, but that did not prevent him from writing *la Chartreuse de Parme.* Leaving on one side the nineteenth century, so as not to wound any susceptibilities, we must admit that numerous novels were published in France before the beginning of the year 1801, we could count them by thousands and thousands of volumes. Many of them stirred enthusiasm, and exercised an influence on the manners of their time, but

how many of them exist now? And by novels I mean purely works of imagination, free from all ideas of philosophical propagandism. Not taking into account *Gil Blas*, an initial and pregnant work from which was to spring the modern novel, there remained three which took no heed of fashions or customs, which have resisted time, have made all hearts beat, charmed all minds, and which at this hour have lost nothing of their youth: they are *la Princesse de Clèves*, *Manon Lescaut*, and *Paul et Virginie*. Ought we to say three novels, are they not rather three narratives?

In truth form counts for little in these three masterpieces, the author did not trouble much about it, neither does the reader. The emotion stirred by them is none the less of an intensity nearly allied to anguish. Léon Gozlan acknowledged it with surprise and said: "If we wrote like these people we should be stoned." I imagine, however, that the author of the *Nuits du Père-Lachaise* would not have felt too much humiliated if he had written *Paul et Virginie* or even *la Chaumière indienne*. If perfection of form alone opens the door of posterity to works of imagination, whence comes the persistent success which the translation of certain foreign works has obtained in France? We must not content ourselves with vain words, which however seduc-

tive they may be, are only the expression of a paradox, bred in the brains of a man of talent on one of his days of bad temper or cheerfulness. So little is idea born of form that without the idea the form could not exist.

If the authors of the *Princesse de Clèves*, *Manon*, and *Paul et Virginie* found for those three stories the style which does not grow old, it is precisely because they did not seek for style, and contented themselves with interpreting in the most straightforward way possible their thoughts and impressions. The simplicity of the form equals the simplicity of the conception, there is no disagreement between them; they are really made for one another, and result in a marvellous harmony. Ernest Renan, to whom no one can deny the art and science of writing, the knowledge of exquisite elegance of style, grace, and ability, proclaimed a striking truth when he said in his *Souvenirs d'enfance:* "The fundamental rule of style is to keep solely in view the thought that you wish to inculcate, and consequently to have a thought." This is an amplification of the phrase written by Balzac in *Un Prince de la Bohème*: "Style comes from ideas, not from words."

With Gautier the idea was created enveloped in its form, quite clothed so to speak, the two operations of mind being simultaneous; that

is why he wrote without correcting his MS., and almost always without re-reading it; he had only to listen to his own dictation. His æsthetics, very simple, consisted in expressing at his best what he had conceived. Literature seemed to him an art complete in itself, emancipated from all philosophical, political, and social interference. He rejected with energy all the metaphysical rubbish with which George Sand so often perplexed herself, disdaining as inferior the novel with a purpose, and affirming by his precepts as well as by his work, that we need not seek elsewhere than in our own imagination the elements of a literary production. He had, like all of us, his preferences for such or such a manner of creating and practising the art of letters, but he had too enlightened a mind not to be eclectic. He admired the beautiful wherever he found it, and welcomed it, never thinking of asking for its certificate of baptism. This act of justice was easy to him, for in spite of the bonds of his youth, the persistent and justified admirations of his mature age, he was independent, feeling strong enough not to belong to any coterie, and sufficiently master to be of no school. In this respect there was a certain contradiction in him which was only a pretence, and which I must explain by re-

calling that he said: "After 1833 I buried the Middle Ages."

Gautier, carried away by his passion for art, actuated perhaps by the instinct of self-preservation, which so often guides us without our knowing it, belonged body and soul to the Romanticist school, for only there, in 1830, could he find the freedom for which his literary temperament craved in order to manifest itself without constraint. He remained to the end faithful to the principles he had adopted, not at all out of respect for the accepted compact, nor from habit, but from artistic predilection, because those principles were in accordance with his ideas and aspirations. He said to me one day: "I was a Romanticist by birth"; and nothing could have been truer. The school did not enrol him one of themselves, he existed before they did; the result of this is rather singular—he did not believe in schools, on the other hand he believed in individualities, and he was not mistaken. Of all those who entered the family of which Goethe, Schiller, Chateaubriand, and Byron were the ancestors, and of which Victor Hugo was the father, those alone were superior who made a little band apart. Their originality was fortified by the movement with which they associated themselves, but that originality existed of itself, and sooner or later

would have revealed itself. Men born to be captains do not long remain lost in the ranks. I have already mentioned Théophile Gautier, and Alfred de Musset, who hardly had time to be disciples before they were masters.

If Gautier did not believe in schools, still less did he believe in theories in art. Every work of art—novel or picture, symphony or statue—is the result of gestation. When the child has reached its full term it comes into the world: viable or not—no one knows; the future must decide it. That is why in the artistic world disappointments are so frequent, for no one knows or can know, in virtue of what rules he must produce. Therefore all theories are vain, most frequently the disciples only succeed by doing the contrary to what they have been taught to do, and breaking the circle in which the lessons they have received had enclosed them. David was the pupil of de Vien, and Delacroix of Guérin. Not only are theories vain, they are never anything but retrospective; they always come *a posteriori*, much more for the purpose of justifying faults, than to praise up qualities. Most of them are the product of wounded vanity, which, surprised if not indignant at being discussed, resists and wishes to lay down as a new law, precisely the defects with which it is reproached. The story of the

fox without a tail, belongs to all times and all societies. In its essence Art is infinite and universal, to wish to tie it down to rigid rules, to restrict it to fixed limits, is to confound it with trade, to prove that we do not understand it, for deprived of initiative it no longer exists.

Gautier professed such devotion to Art that he preferred it to nature. In nature he only saw a document more or less correct, which the artist interprets, modifying it according to his ability, his fancy, and his genius; he who copies it servilely may be an artisan, endowed with a real talent for imitation, but he will only be an artisan, never an artist. Everything, too, which approached to what has been called realism, or naturalism, displeased him. To him a work was not complete until a man had given his impress to it; I mean the impress of the master, which is immortal. Gautier preferred the Parthenon to the most beautiful mountains; the landscapes which he admired most were those of Claude Lorrain, and woman seemed to him inferior to the statue. He thought thus when he was quite young; what is called the "age of passion" left his artistic opinions intact. He was eighteen when he entered Rioult's studio.

"The first female model did not appear beautiful

to me," he said, "she disappointed me singularly, so much does Art add to the most perfect nature. She was, nevertheless, a very pretty girl, whose graceful and pure lines I appreciated later by comparison, but after that first impression I have always preferred the statue to the woman, and marble to flesh."

He was never inconsistent, and never ceased to proclaim the superiority of Art over nature, which on the whole he does not seem to have cared much for. His Tiburce in the *Toison d'or* resembles him greatly, for "by reason of living in books and pictures he had arrived at no longer finding nature real." And yet when he is at Venice, and saturated with pictures, architecture, and all the masterpieces of the Renaissance, he lands at Fusina, what a cry of joy there is at finding some greenery and walking amongst the wild flowers!

If he was enamoured of the literary and plastic arts, there was one on the other hand which he disdained, and to which he remained indifferent — that was music. Apropos of a phrase written in an album: "Music is the most costly and tiresome of all noises," one asked oneself what one was to think of it. We must think what he took care to say himself in his study on Saint Amant. "I must confess that the grating of a saw, or of the fourth string of

the cleverest violinist, have exactly the same effect upon me. He said, moreover, that Victor Hugo and Lamartine suffered in the same way.

If in what concerns Art and literature, Théophile Gautier had very advanced ideas, we should be at a loss to determine what was his system of philosophy; properly speaking we might say he had none. Those for the most part unfathomable problems which we in general only try to resolve by hypotheses, did not frighten him, but they did not attract him either; he loved tranquility of mind, and was afraid of compromising it if he troubled it with an examination that could never end in anything but a relative certainty. The name of God occurs often in his verses, especially in the earliest ones. What God? It would doubtless not have been easy to him to explain exactly; in any case it was the God who loves, who pardons, who understands, and who is not angry with man for using the faculties with which He has endowed him. So simple and consoling a conception must have pleased Gautier, for if God has created man in His own image, we must acknowledge that man has made a good return for it. He seems never to have been animated by anything but vague religious scruples, tending towards pantheism, with nothing clearly defined, or correctly orthodox.

He was neither a sceptic nor a believer, but in a way he suffered from religious doubts. Like all those who have lived much, not to say entirely on imagination, he was not a disbeliever in the supernatural, and the various kinds of infernal regions promised to us by various religions did not reassure him at all. He would say with a smile, "Perhaps it is true." Did he see, or had he seen any light beyond the grave? I do not know. Death appeared to him cold, ugly, and black, and he did not like to think of it. He was respectful, never laughing at the faith of others, and said, "I have not, thank God, any Voltairian ideas about the clergy," but the clearness of his understanding did not allow him to shut his eyes to palpable facts, and he agreed that in Spain, at Cordova, Catholicism, "undermined by the spirit of criticism, is growing weaker from day to day even in the countries where it held undisputed sway." Further on, apropos of the cathedrals which elevated the faith of the Middle Ages, he deplores the weakening of faiths, but this regret is only that of an artist disheartened by the mediocrities of his time. That proves that, like George Sand, he had a soul impossible to satisfy with what interests the greater part of mankind.

In politics he was neutral from indifference, and above all out of contempt; he found that

the governments under which he had lived resembled each other in this, that they were all afraid to appear to have understanding. He considered them almost exclusively in their relation to the arts, which gave him a handle when he was in the humour to criticise. Before the Ministry of January 2, 1870, the directorship of the fine arts was added on to the administration of the emperor's household, an office then held by Marshall Vaillant. Gautier said of this transaction:

"To choose a marshal of France, a venerable soldier, but whose æsthetics leave something to be desired, to give the impetus to painting, architecture, sculpture, and music, is as brilliant an idea, as to confide the command of armies to Ingres, the painter of the *Stratoniæ*, or to Adolphe Adam, singer of the *Postillon de Lonjumeau*."

"When Théophile Gautier proclaimed such palpable truths as these, people smiled condescendingly, and accused him of making paradoxes. He made many of the same kind, for abundant matter was furnished to him for the purpose. He usually shrugged his shoulders, dreamed of some satirical poetry, said to himself, "What is the use?" and thought no more about it.

Like most dreamers, he was rather prone to admire men of action, and yet all violence was repugnant to him ; war filled him with horror, and revolutions made him despair. His ideal was not of this world, he wished for a state of civilisation where intelligence, beauty, and the arts, were honoured, and where every effort would have been towards expansion of mind, a sort of abbey of Thelema, on the shores of some peaceful gulf, under the shelter of groves of lemon-trees, in view of the Parthenon. He was born like that, and could not help it, that is why he felt oppressed, and suffered ; rebellion would have been useless, and a struggle absurd ; he knew that, and resigned himself.

Resigned, that is the right word; in his life, so opposed to all his aspirations, he supported everything with a sort of Musulman fatalism. In his profession of dramatic critic, he was at times placed under men whose intelligence and doubtful probity, justified the contempt which he felt for them, and he submitted to them, saying, " It would seem that it ought to be so, seeing that it is. It is the just punishment of my crime of poverty, and yet God knows that if I am criminal it is much against my will." Certainly he regretted not having the means which would have made him independent, and he was sorry to be forced to live from day to

day in such a manner that all idleness, even all sickness, was forbidden to him, under pain of finding the cupboard empty, and hearing the creditors knock at his door. And yet if he had been offered the dreamed-of life, the life of Fortunio, on condition of renouncing poetry and never writing verses again, he would have rejected the offer without hesitation, and, like Antony of Navarre, in his castle of Good Fortune, he would have replied:

"J'aime mieux ma mie, au gué!
J'aime mieux ma mie." [1]

He was not called upon to resist, for they did not tempt him. He only knew the value of money by the difficulty he had in gaining it. He never understood how to fight for his own interests; was it from carelessness, from the conviction of his own incompetence in such matters, or modesty? I do not know, but he was the most disinterested of men, and in that his greatness suffered no abatement. Free from all spirit of intrigue, credulous like all those who do not lie, he never put himself forward. He never made more out of his talent than a subsistence, and never deigned to push himself,

[1] "I love my love best, i'faith!
I love my love the best."

which would have been easier to him than to any other whom we could name, for at need his pen would have been redoubtable. The struggle for life, so common in our own day, he never attempted, not that he lacked strength or courage, but because the arms that he would have been obliged to employ, were repugnant to the loyalty of his hands and his artistic conscience. He dreamed of gaining some official position, and was surprised that his abilities were not utilised, but to obtain what he desired, he would have been obliged to put himself forward, and his muse held him aloof from all competition. If he could not be "something," he was "some one," which is of more value for his reputation.

The more civilisation, pursuing its resistless march, penetrates into democracy, the less men like Théophile Gautier, the dreamers, the poets, the lovers of beautiful things by which we do not live, perhaps because they are immortal, the less will these elect find a place in human society. Their work having no immediate usefulness, and representing but an ideal value, will be more and more disdained. Our day is for action, the dream is condemned. Each one for himself, and the devil take the hindmost. We elbow our way to the front, if we do not cut a way for ourselves. What is the poet to do in

the midst of this crowd and scrimmage, I mean the man who is entirely a poet, holding his lyre in his hand, having no other care than to prevent it from being broken in the strife of interested passions? There is no François Ier in our day to distribute pensions to the makers of rhymes, no prelates to bestow benefits upon them, no great patrons to help them to live. I think it is better so; poetry has doffed a livery to resume its primitive drapery, but sometimes the costume is insufficient, and the poet suffers for it. What can governments do in the matter? Nothing, or very little. We cannot create poets: competitions, or prizes for poetry are powerless; they can only be recompensed after they have manifested themselves. I will go further and say it is a duty, when they have given proof of talent, to place them in a position where they will not have to suffer from narrow circumstances, and can develop their faculties without being condemned to provide for the necessities of life, by means of an irksome labour. When Lamartine published his *Méditations* in 1820, Louis XVIII. sent him the collection of the masterpieces of French literature, edited by Didot—that was excellent, for Lamartine was rich; if he had been poor, a pension would have been more useful.

Did Gautier perhaps regret those days when

the poet, by means of pensions which secured his subsistence, could, without too many material preoccupations, wind the golden thread of his thoughts on the spinning-wheel of sonorous rhymes? I should not be surprised. He implies it, when, in counting up Scarron's means, and relating the pleasant discussion between Colletet and Richelieu about the word "barboter" (to dabble) proposed by the former, rejected by the latter, he exclaims, "What a happy century was that, in which a minister like Richelieu, in the midst of so many great things which he did, or meditated doing, could yet find time to occupy himself with the productions of the mind, and discuss with a poet the appropriateness of a term!" Gautier certainly never discussed with M. Rouher the value of a word, the divisions of a verse, or the initial letter, but in the last years of the Second Empire he found —what was of more importance—intelligent patrons who understood him, adopted him, and simplified his life, by making it less difficult.[1] By means of his regular work on the *Journal officiel*, more generously remunerated, and also by a sinecure librarianship with a princess, patron of

[1] By a decree of April 25, 1863, M. Rouland, Minister of Public Instruction, accorded an annual indemnity of 3,000 francs (£120) to Théophile Gautier, who, thanks to M. Jules Simon, received it up to his death.

letters, he was at last able to emerge from the atmosphere in which he was suffocating. Did he, as was stated, receive a pension paid directly by the Imperial Cabinet? I do not know, but I do not believe that he did. For the rest he would not have been the only one, for although Napoleon III. had little taste for literature, and understood nothing of Art, whenever it was pointed out to him that there was a kind action to be done, his generosity knew no hesitation. The annual budget of good works—help and patronage—undertaken by his privy purse, was fixed at 3,500,000 francs —10,000 francs a day, as the writers and artists of his time knew. May this homage rendered to truth be placed to the credit of the fallen sovereign.

So life began to show itself more propitious towards Gautier; he might believe himself free for ever from the worries and difficulties which had harassed him for so long. More than this, absolute ease seemed to be secured to his future, for a seat had been pointed out in the senate near the one upon which Sainte-Beuve had sat. The dream was too beautiful that was to delude his old age. He was living in the fairyland of his dream when there came a rough change of scene, and the poor poet foundered in the disaster in which France

nearly perished. The war, the fourth of September Revolution, the siege of Paris, and the Commune overwhelmed him. He took two years to die of it, but he did die of it, and he was not the only one who had no longer any wish to live, after so many misfortunes. If he did not despair of our country, he was made desperate by her heroic sufferings; he heard the little children crying for hunger, he saw Paris burning, he visited the ruins of our homes and monuments, burnt through envy, drunkenness, and folly, and he was stupefied by it. How can this civilisation of which we are so proud conceal such barbarism? We should have thought that after so many centuries the wild beast in man would have been better tamed. Who is the Orpheus, the Van Amburg, *doctus lenire tigres*, who will tame it? From that day Gautier was crushed.

His patriotism, his belief in a less criminal state of society, his love of letters, now more despised than ever, his belief in his own freedom from the cares of life, again and for a long time compromised, everything within him, mourned. He no longer felt strong enough to struggle, and said, "I live from habit; I have no longer any desire to live." By a natural inspiration, and as though to escape from the troubles of the moment, he returned in thought to the days

of his youth, searched through the cemetery of his past life, and amidst the ashes of remembrance discovered some jewels, just as he found some in the tomb of Aria Marcella.

His life had been made up of disappointments, and perhaps the most bitter came from the knowledge that he owed his celebrity more to his journalistic work, than to his poems. Was not that what he meant when speaking of himself he wrote: "This poet, who owes to his journalistic work the small notoriety of his name, has naturally done something in the way of verse-making." All his dreams had vanished one after the other, and he found himself on the threshold of old age, which was approaching, working continuously, though he was already weakened by an illness of which he was still unaware. Among the desires which he had had, a single one remained to him. He wished to belong to the French Academy, where his talent as a writer, and his profound knowledge of the French language, had for so many years marked out his place. He was tired and surprised that he had to go through so long a probation on that illustrious forty-first fauteuil upon which Balzac and Alexandre Dumas, two great pioneers of literature, had sat before him. Three times already had he knocked at those obstinately closed doors. On the 2nd of May,

1866, he presented himself to succeed Baron de Barante—and old Gratry was elected. On the 7th of May, 1868, he solicited the place left vacant by the death of Ponsard, and Autran was preferred before him. Again, on the 29th of April, 1869, he became a candidate at the election destined to replace Empis, and after four ballots Auguste Barbier, whom in *Italia* Gautier had called the bilious poet, came out conqueror from the contest, which was a hot one.

The Academy regretted, I believe, having excluded the author of so many works which do honour to French literature, and in 1872 they seem to have decided to accord to this great writer the consecration which he asked for. Before they could carry out their intention, however, death had elected the poet who had sung the comedy of it, and who had not even had the consolation of wearing the uniform with the green palms, which—like so many others—he had laughed at in the days of his youth. Does not this recall certain stanzas in Heinrich Heine's *Romancero?* The Shah Mohamed calls to mind the poet Firdusi, who lives in poverty in the town of Thus, and he gives orders that "presents equivalent to the annual tribute of a province" be sent to him. The long file of dromedaries laden with the presents from the sovereign sets forward. "The caravan entered

Thus by the southern gate, with a brilliant flourish of trumpets, and shouts of joy; but by the northern gate, at the other end of the town, at the same moment a funeral procession passed out, carrying to the grave the dead poet Firdusi."

The malady which since the days of the war, and the Commune, slowly destroyed Gautier's robust constitution, became so threatening that there was no hope for him, and on the 23rd of October, 1872, he ceased to live, at the age of sixty-one. The terrors of death were spared to him, he fell asleep and did not wake again. Perhaps in the dream of his last slumber, he may have murmured the words of Feuchtersleben, "I depart for a more glorious planet."

I have nothing more to say about the writer. Of the man I will say but one thing—he was a good man in every sense of the word, and often put in practice for the service of others one of his well-known axioms: "It is only the poor who know how to spend money." Hospitable as an Arab in his big tent, he received at his table—his very modest table—all the hungry souls who presented themselves. During one of the most critical periods of his life, in the years immediately following the 1848 Revolution, he lodged in his flat in the rue Rougemont, comrades more destitute than himself, and the idea never entered his head to shirk

these burdens of benevolence, which increased the burdens of duty that were crushing him. He did not boast of it or complain, I doubt if he ever mentioned it, but as a witness I owe it to him to testify to it, and tell the truth.

To conclude, and to indicate without dwelling upon it, what were the cares with which his life was clouded, I will borrow from M. Spoelberch de Lovenjoul's [1] work a letter which should be quoted without comment, for it explains itself, and throws some light upon the difficulties that ceaselessly assailed the poet. He was at St. Petersburg, whither he had been called to collaborate in a work which, as it was not accomplished, caused him another disappointment. He had received a letter from his sisters, and he replies to it in these terms on December 17, 1858:

"My sole regret is that I am not richer, and that I can give you so little. I am responsible for you to our dear dead parents, and as long as I live, you will always have what I had no need to promise you, for you knew without my saying a word that I would keep my promise until my last breath. . . . You know how disgusted and weary I am with men and things, I only live for those whom I love, for personally I have no further pleasure on earth. Art,

[1] Introduction, xi.

pictures, the theatre, books, no longer amuse me, they are to me but the material for irksome labour, which is never-ending. Do not add to all these troubles such phrases as those which end one of your letters, or I shall lay myself down on the earth, and die with my face to the wall, without making any further effort. . . . I was very sad on the 2nd of November, thinking of all those who are no more. It was almost dark at midday, the sky was yellow, the earth covered with snow, and I so far from my country, entirely alone at an inn, trying to write an article which would not come, and upon which depended—bitter thought! —the daily bread of so many mouths large and small. I goaded myself, and dug the spurs into my flanks, but my mind was like a broken-down horse, who would rather be beaten and die, than attempt to get up. I did accomplish it however—my article, and it was very good. I wrote one too on the day our mother died, and it served to bury her." [1]

This letter is tantamount to a confession. In a few lines it explains a whole life—the accepted sacrifices, the forced labour, the work accomplished in order not to fail in duties of which we see here but the very smallest part, the tenderness, the devotion, that neither the bitterness of life, nor the disgust of forced work, could hinder, the moral suffering over which an in-

[1] Théophile Gautier's mother died on Sunday, March 26, 1848.

domitable spirit triumphed; the confession is complete, and should be kept in mind. Those who know how to read this lamentation, weighing the words of it in order to penetrate more deeply into the man's heart, will know Gautier for what he was, and will repeat the words that on his days of melancholy he so often let fall about himself—"Poor Théo!"

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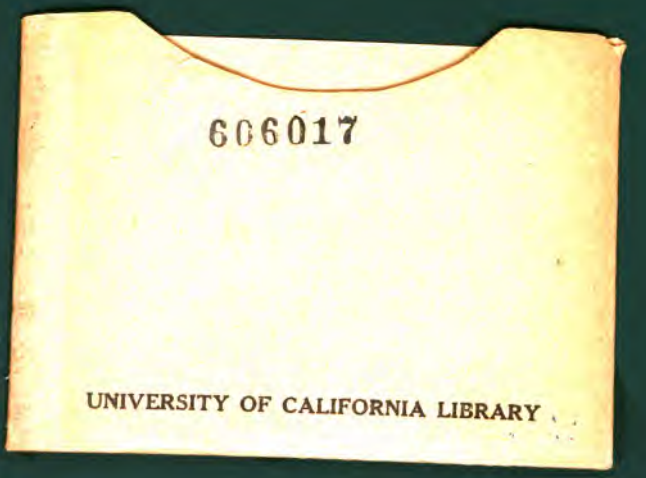
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